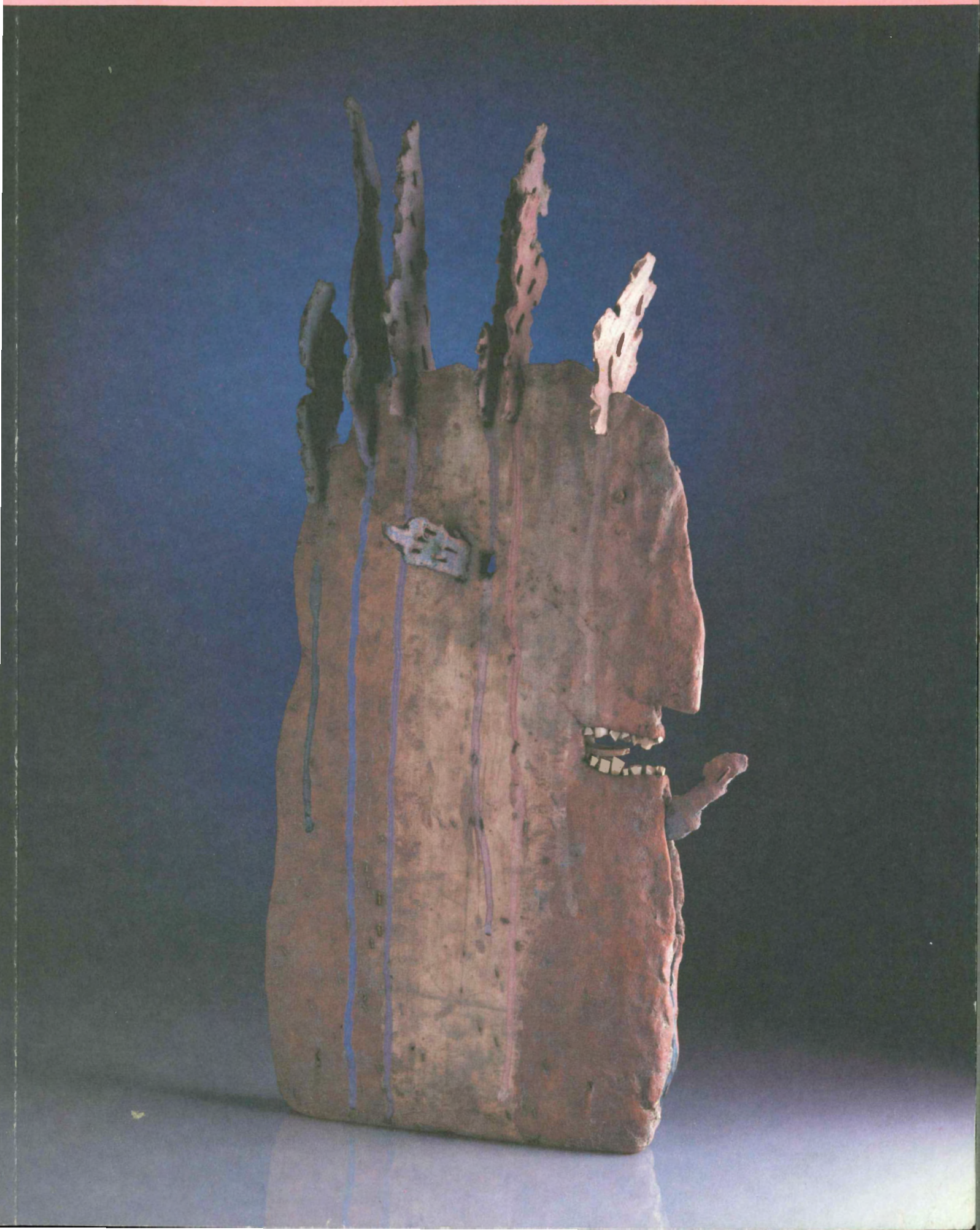
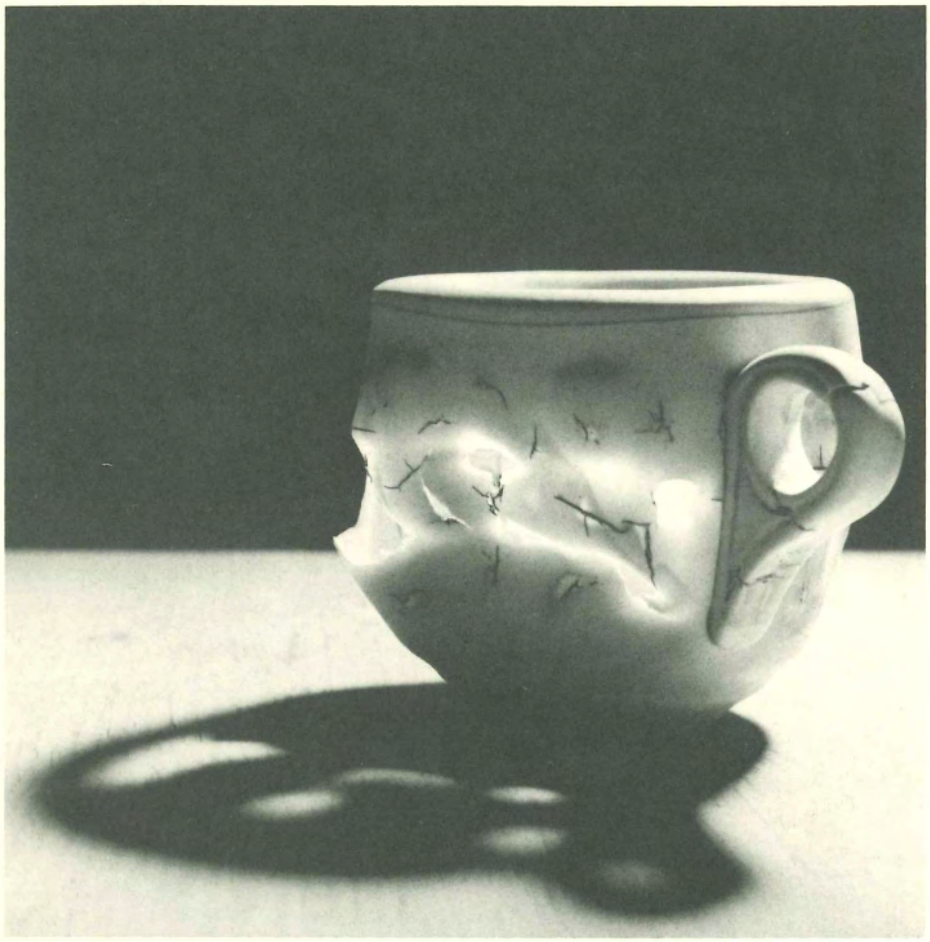
AMERICAN CERAMICS 2/1





Irv Tepper

January 14-
February 5

Rudy Autio

February 11-
March 19

MORGAN GALLERY
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John Gill, *Wine Ewer*, 1982, Stoneware, 13" high

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STATEMENTS

JUN KANEKO

NEW CLAY WORK & DRAWINGS
FEBRUARY/MARCH

JUN KANEKO
TONY HEPBURN
AURORE CHABOT
MICHAEL LUCERO
VIOLA FREY
BETTY WOODMAN
KIRK MANGUS
TERRY ROSENBERG

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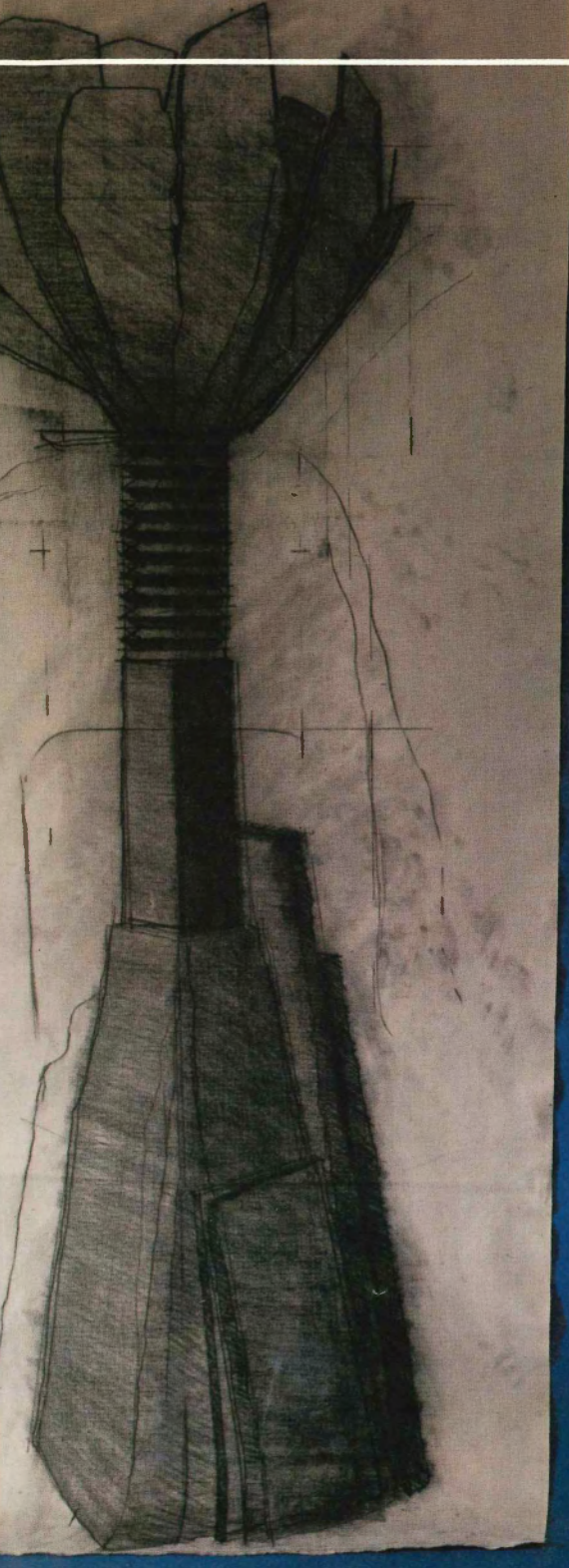
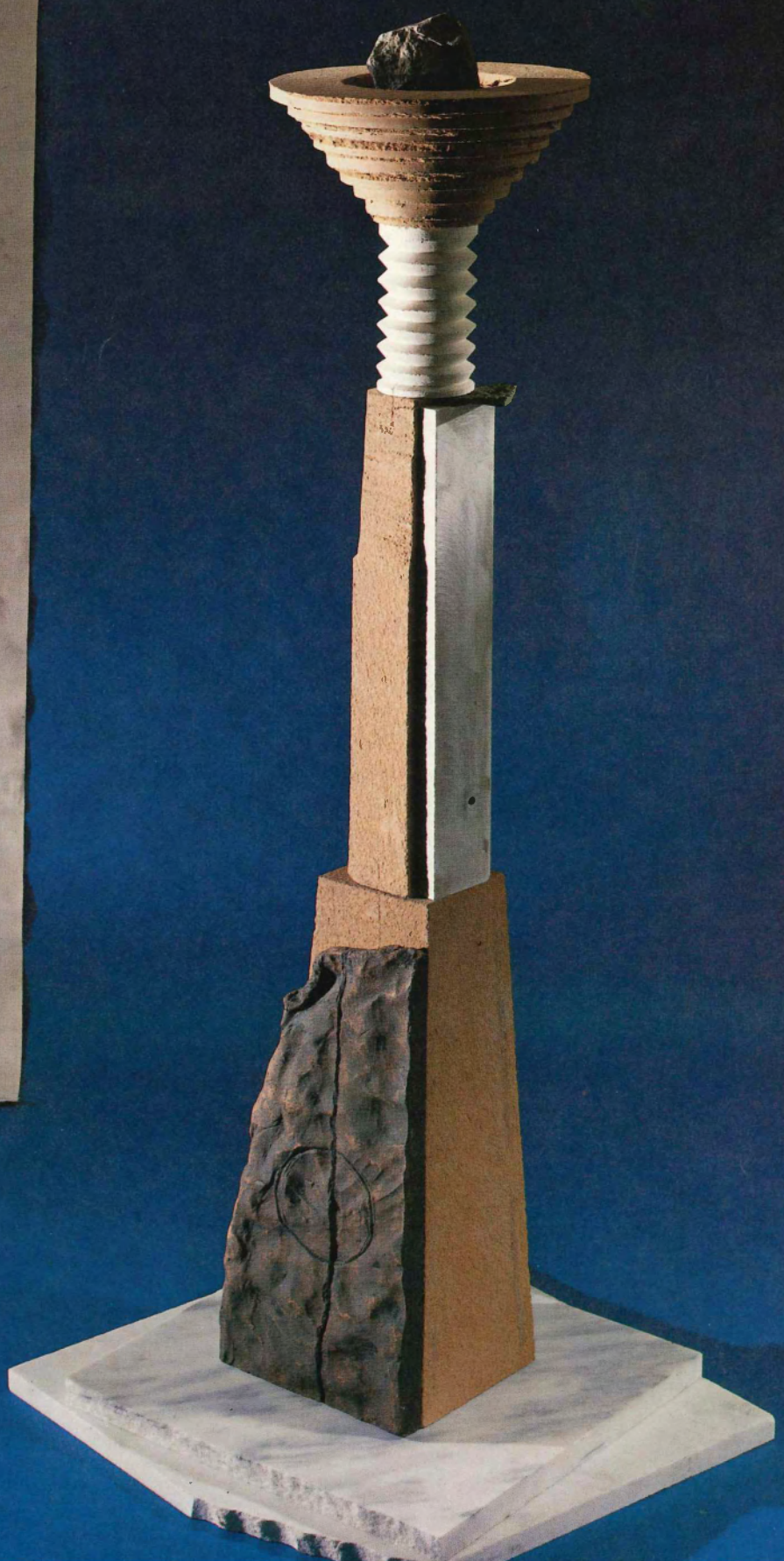
CATALOGUE AVAILABLE

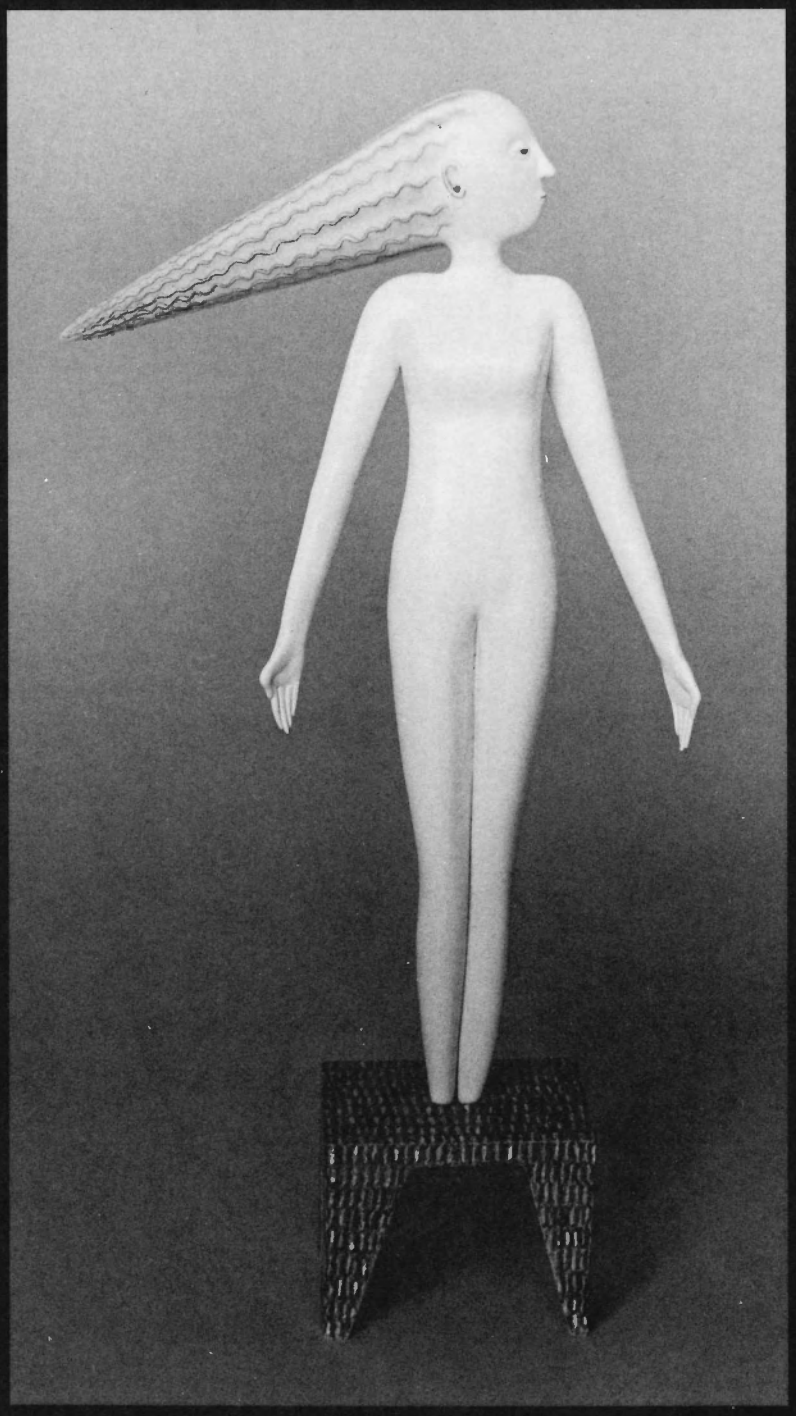
TONY HEPBURN





PHOTOS MALCOLM VARON, NYC

NANCY CARMAN



JANUARY 17 —
FEBRUARY 12
1983

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THE FEMININE, 1982
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PRIVATE COLLECTION

The Ceramic Art Quarterly
Volume 2, Number 1, Winter 1983

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(Cover) Untitled *(1980) by Judy Moonelis, 24" (60 cm) high. Collection Edward Claycomb, New York. Photo: Brad Guice.*

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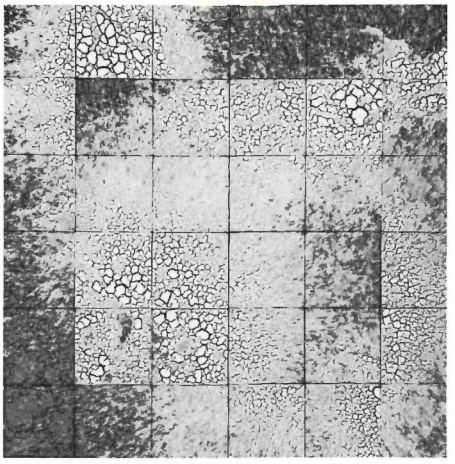
Elements Gallery Winter Schedule



ARCHITECTURAL CERAMICS

January 13–February 12

Robert Sperry

PERSONAL ICONOGRAPHY

February 17–March 12

Ann Adair
Rudy Autio
Douglas Baldwin
Robert Arneson
Christine Federighi
Jack Earl
Frank Fleming
Lois Hennessey
Ken Little
Richard Lipscher
Coille Hooven
Howard Kottler
Richard Notkin
Jens Morrison
Deborah Horrell
Tom Rippon
Bruce Morosko
Ronna Neuenschwander

Richard Notkin, "Pyramidal Skull Teapot and Four Cube Skull Cups," Porcelain

NEIL TETKOWSKI

March 15–April 9

Neil Tetkowski, Earthenware Platter 1982 Diameter 38"

90 Hudson Street
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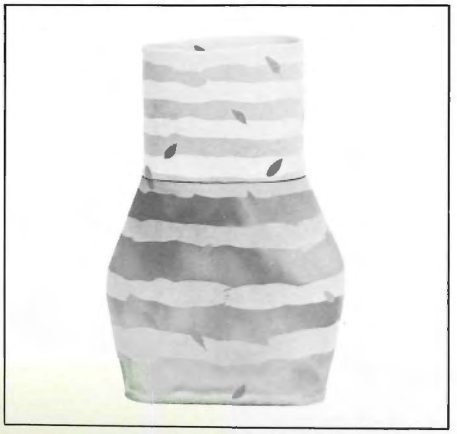
ELEMENTS GALLERY



DONNA POLSENO

March 15–April 9

Donna Polseno, Raku Vessel, 1982, 17"

CONVERGENCE

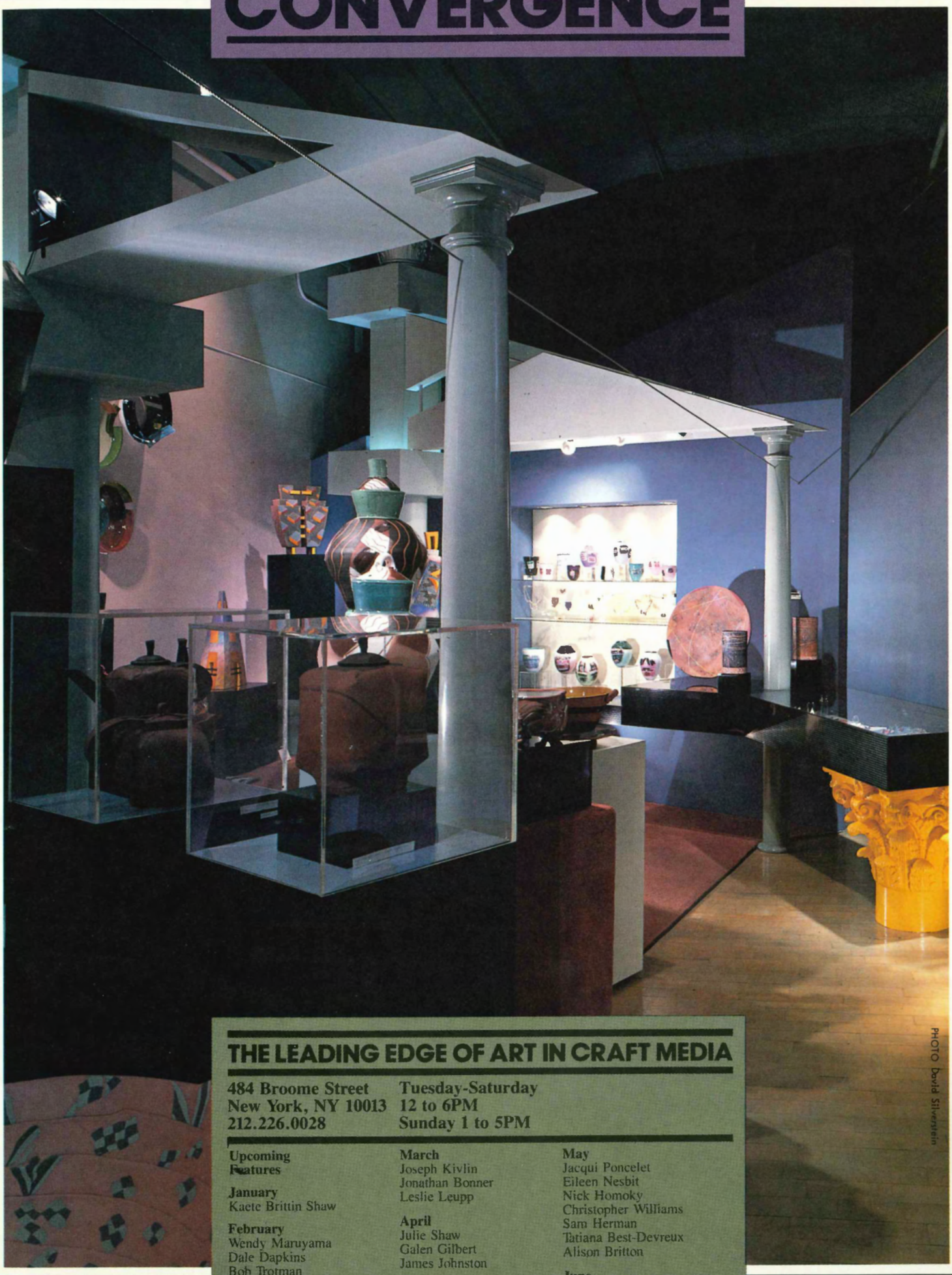


PHOTO David Silverstein

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Upcoming Features

January
Kaete Brittin Shaw

February
Wendy Maruyama
Dale Dapkins
Bob Trotman

March
Joseph Kivlin
Jonathan Bonner
Leslie Leupp

April
Julie Shaw
Galen Gilbert
James Johnston

May
Jacqui Poncelet
Eileen Nesbit
Nick Homoky
Christopher Williams
Sam Herman
Tatiana Best-Devreux
Alison Britton

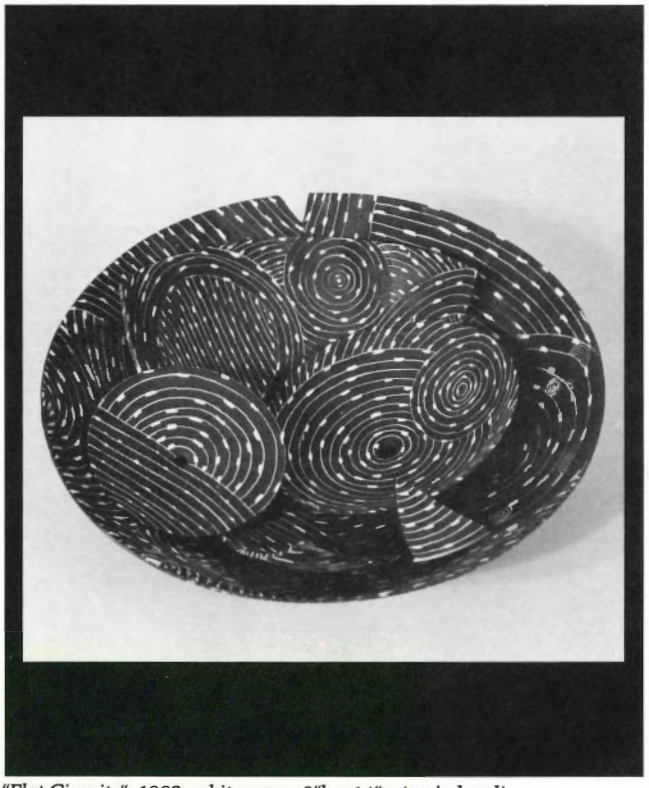
June
Constance Miller

"Helen's Descent", 1982, covered vessel, ceramic, 21"h x 16" x 14"

RUDY AUTIO

New Figurative Vessels

MARCH



"Flat Circuits", 1982, white ware, 3"h x 14"w (main bowl)

CHRISTINA BERTONI

New Work

APRIL

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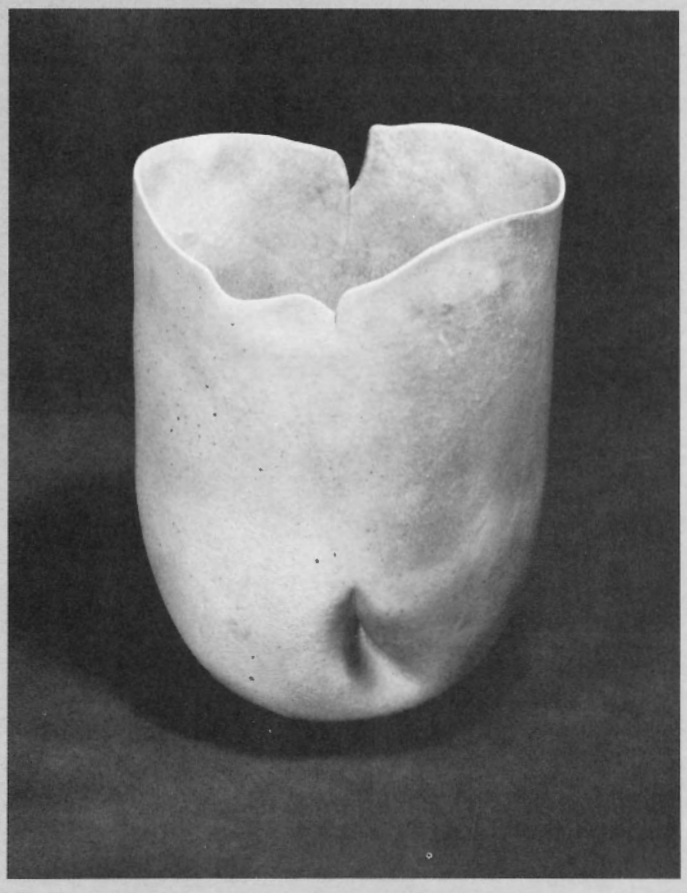
CURRENTS III

RICHARD DEVORE: 1972-1982

The Milwaukee Art Museum

February 17 — May 15, 1983

A catalog will be available.



Untitled, 1982, 14⅞" x 12" x 11"

RICHARD DEVORE
ROBERT TURNER
DENNIS MITCHELL

RUTH DUCKWORTH
THOM BOHNERT
GEORGE TIMOCK

PETER VOULKOS
TONY HEPBURN
JIM MAKINS

MARCH - APRIL

PRIME EVIDENCE:

Exhibit A

233 E. Ontario Street Chicago, Illinois 60611 312-944-1748

Untitled 9½" h. burnished earthenware

Lydia Buzio

Soho Rooftops

The Primal Vessel

Roberta Marks
Richard Deutsch
Rick Hirsch

January 8 - February 5, 1983

GARTH CLARK GALLERY
5820 Wilshire Blvd Los Angeles 90036
(213) 939 2189

Akio Takamori, Untitled 1982 stoneware

Akio Takamori

The Archie Bray Series

Beatrice Wood

New Luster Work

February 12 - March 5, 1983

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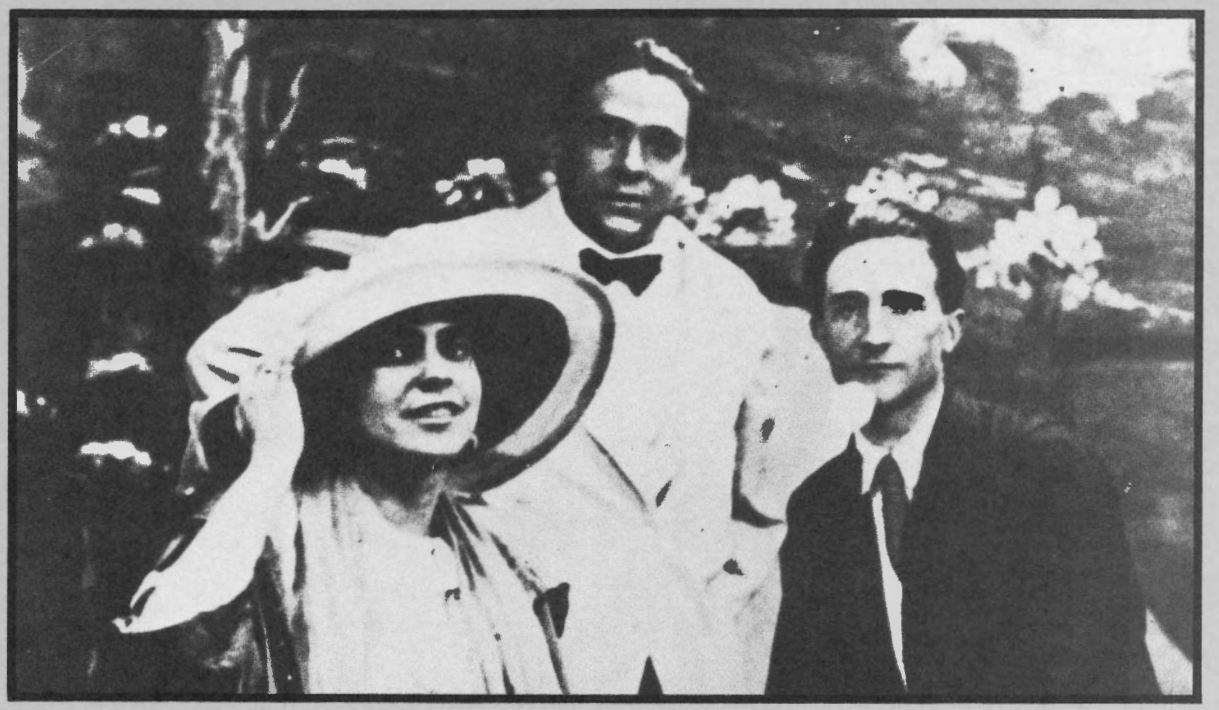

Beatrice Wood, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Coney Island 1917

Beatrice Wood

February 5 - March 3
Drawings and Ceramics 1917 - 1982
a Retrospective Exhibition Organized
by California State University, Fullerton,
Art Galleries. Toured through 1983
by the Garth Clark Gallery.

February 12 - March 5
New Luster Work at Garth Clark Gallery

March 4
Blindman's Ball II. A Dada Homage
to Beatrice Wood on the Occasion
of the Artist's 90th Birthday.

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The Works Gallery
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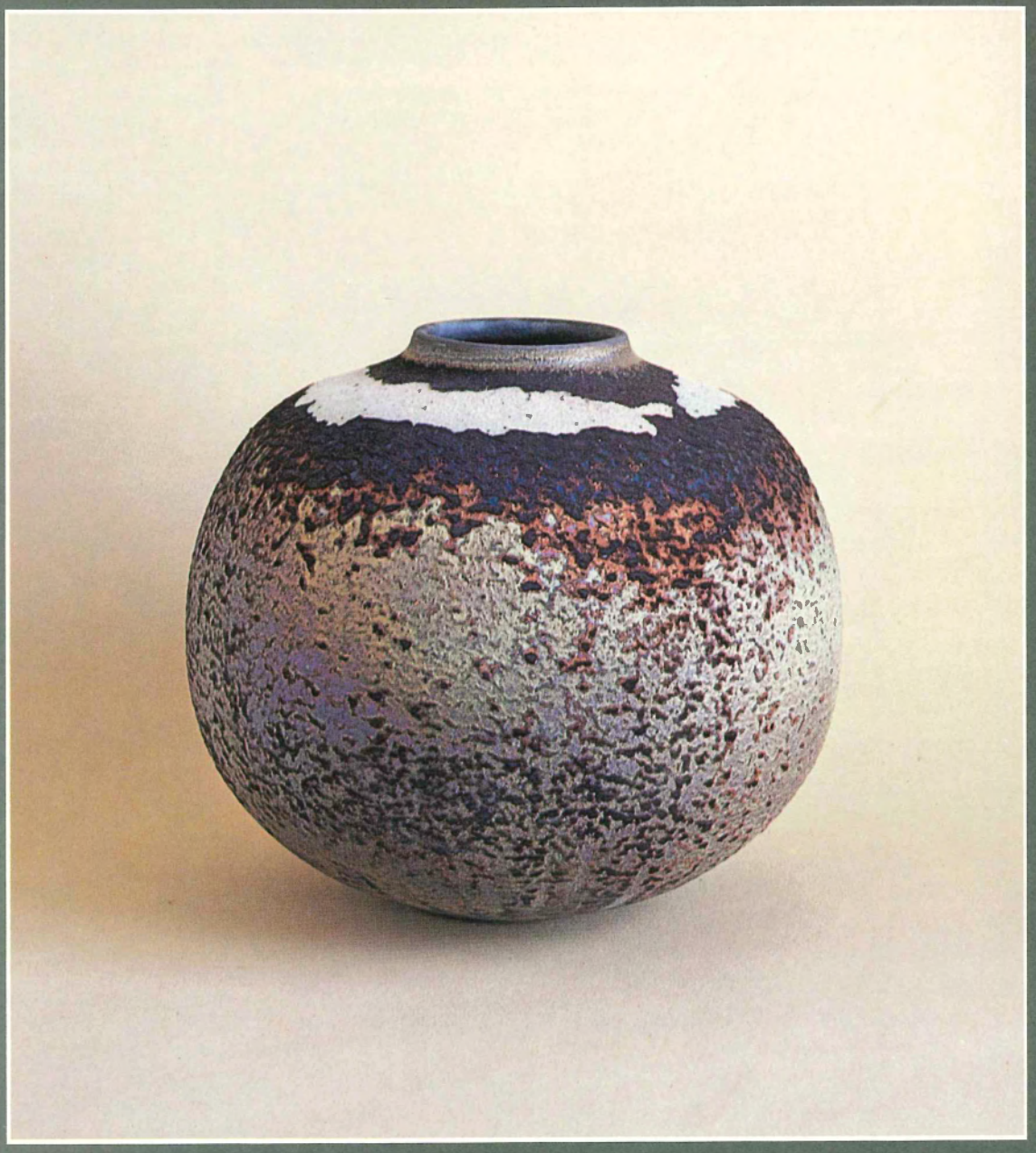
Great AMERICAN Gallery



HARVEY SADOW

MARCH 5-APRIL 1

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MARCH 5-APRIL 23

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Rich Lipscher
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Mara Superior
Lisa Waters
Bradley Wiseman

March 27-April 27, 1983

College Art Gallery
State University College
New Paltz, New York

An illustrated catalogue with statements by guest curator Terri Lonier and Michael McTwigan will accompany the exhibition.

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editor, *American Ceramics*

Carol Sedestrom
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Anne Shattuck
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April 7-June 1

Newport Harbor Art Museum
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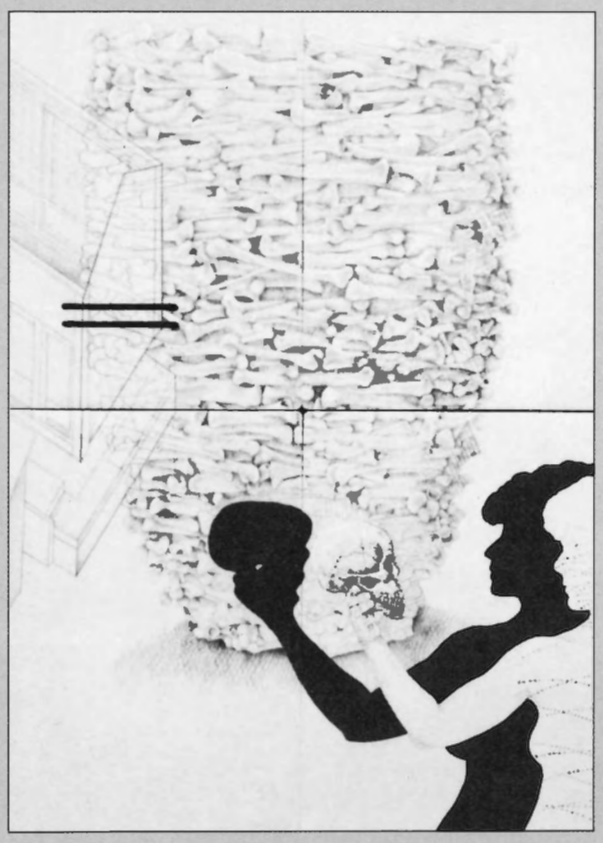
Catalog available

Judy's Jump Cup, 1982
Collection of Dr. Martin & Judy Schwartz



DEBORAH HORRELL
January 9-February 27

John Michael Kohler Arts Center
608 New York Avenue
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Resting on the Origin *(1978), 25¾" (65.4 cm) high. Photo: Stephen Young.*

Unexpected Meeting *(1979), 40" x 18" (101.6 x 45.7 cm). Photo: Stephen Young.*

Nest of Bones: Deborah Horrell

Louise Klemperer

Louise Klemperer Why did you decide to use Japanese imagery?

Deborah Horrell I looked at the Ukiyo-e prints six or seven years ago. I liked the simplification of human form and I was drawn to the beauty of the imagery. I'm a parroter—I use other sources for images in my work, but I have to change or personalize them. All the patterns in the kimonos, all the coiffures were fascinating, and I wanted to incorporate them. In Japan, every detail is seen as being important, and I liked that approach.

LK Combining Japanese imagery with ducks was your way of personalizing it? Why on earth ducks?

DH They offer a sense of dualism. My interest in birds is their ability to fly, to escape; yet ducks are predominantly earthbound and awkward.

LK But then, you have said, by the time you made *Ichikawa's Encounter* and *A Question of Identity,* the duck-geisha or duck-samurai combination had gone dead for you. What happened?

DH I wanted something more powerful. I use the same image in a series of work and with each use, it transforms. Over time, images become either too stripped down or too caricatured, and then I begin with new ones. The bird began full-bodied, then was transformed to skeletal; the geisha-duck began with a facial combination of human and duck and changed to skeletal combinations of humans with wings. Initially, images come from my unconscious and I work with them without questioning what they mean. With exposure to the images, I begin to understand their suggestion. When all of the questions are answered and something becomes too obvious, it is abandoned—it has lost its mystery and consequently its magnetism.

LK That's ironic—the more understanding you have of an image, the less magic or power it has. Meanings and symbolism are so tricky in art. Obviously, images aren't meaningless, yet, if you say "the bird means spirituality, the bones mean death, and so on," the whole thing goes flat and dead.

DH It's the combination of symbols and multiple meanings that's important. If you interpret a symbol by stripping away all ambiguity until you have refined a multitudinous suggestion down to one succinct thought, it goes dry. Working with visual art, you get multiple interpretations. It may be simultaneously frightening, puzzling, exhilarating. I keep using the same stuff. My concerns are exactly what they were five years ago: the images don't change, it's just how they are put together.

LK The subject may not change, but I suspect the nuances do.

DH Yes. The nuances. Isn't that amazing? I havn't changed in five years! Just my understanding of my work and of the reasons that generate it have changed. It seems I make art to clarify or work through things I don't understand within my life—existence, life, death. Trying to understand what it is that makes me unhappy, what it is that makes me blissful. The way I express my happiness is in all the beauty I bring to my work, which is just sensually satisfying. Then there's the other side that tries to deal with a more honest view; that side deals with depression. My unhappiness is a source of provocation; it is what my art addresses.

LK What were you dealing with in *A Question of Identity*?

DH In this piece I attempted to look at a duality: my escapism into geishas and birds versus the feeling that I could no longer avoid the reality of things. So I pulled things apart, stripped them down, trying to expose the essential elements. For one of the first

20

times I was able to resist beautifying by decoration and color, and just use the necessary images. So for me it's a real important piece. I'm not sure whether I got closer to the problem of my identity—with geisha, duck, or crane—but at least I wasn't just beautifying. It has very personal imagery. The finger crossed with a feather is my own family crest, and the bone-marrow pattern on the kimono is indicative of the stripping process.

LK So the bone marrow is personal as well as seeming like a basic inner core, the heart of the matter. But then it's printed *on* the kimono . . .

DH Yes, on soft, seductive surface and on structure. The bone marrow print goes right from the kimono onto her skeletal arm.

LK A kind of merging of layers. What's she pointing toward?

DH Somehow I think it's toward indecision.

LK To me the pointing gesture is so clear, yet you are saying this clarity points toward uncertainty.

DH Well, the whole piece is equivocal. I almost see it as if she's trying to make a choice.

LK The curious combination of duck and human features is such a good metaphor for our own natures—an improbable combination of totally contradicting, incompatible elements. The combination of duck-human is bizarre, yet has dignity. There's an irony in such elegance in the gesture and kimono, and in such awkward, odd features.

DH I see it as compassion. The feather she is holding is handmade out of wood.

LK A real alien element then, actually, as well as metaphorically.

DH So again maybe reflecting an element of the incongruous.

LK It seems you are always dealing with polarities: earthbound and flight, beautiful and morbid, two-dimensional and three-dimensional. Is that your conscious intent?

DH In trying to make things more beautiful and also trying to make things clearer, I'm trying not to look and peeking at the same time—like me in the corner spying on the Japanese man talking with the skeleton. I try not to know, I need to know, but realize the reality is not what I want. *Preferred Transition* is much clearer for me than *A Question of Identity.* I made this a more obvious discussion of ideas of transition and metaphors of change.

LK But while the two-dimensional pictures in it depict elegance, the three-dimensional parts seem clunky. I'm having trouble with the disparity between the images of feathers, flying, and the footlike supports.

DH I see the bone supports as a technical solution and not as part of the image.

LK You and I see different figure-ground configurations. I see the supports as part of the figure: you see them as part of the background. To me, the bone supports seem to be either feet or kneeling legs, while the picture is of flying.

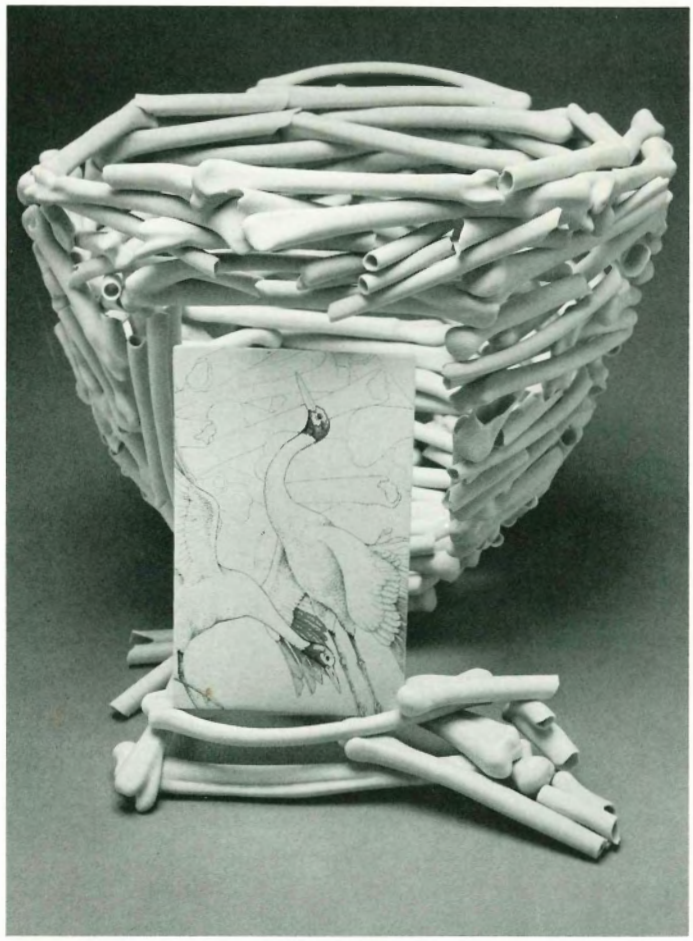
DH Well, maybe again, that's the same kind of duality that appears in all my work; one part making one statement, another contradicting it.

LK Can you say something about your nest pieces as a series?

DH My first was *Resting on the Origin.* Rather awkward. My second *Precarious Postures,* then *Courtship ala Utamaro.* I had pretty much left the geisha-duck pieces. *A Question of Identity,* my last geisha-duck piece, made me realize my work could be simplified and still suggest a lot. I was looking for a symbol to express growth, change. The nest seemed right.

You Are as Glib as I Am *(1978), 22" x 13" (55 x 32.4 cm). Photo: Stephen Young.*

Magic Trick *(1980), 48" (120 cm) high. Photo: Stephen Young.*



Two views of Courtship ala Utamaro *(1979), 12" (30 cm) high. Photo: Stephen Young.*

LK How, with that conscious intent, did you decide to use bones for the elements in the nests?

DH Whatever I do, I try to impose my own signature. Since bones have been a long-time concern of mine, ever since gradeschool when I made a sculpture of turkey bones, I figured if the nests were made of bones it would be more personal in the sense of being my own imagery. Bones are visually beautiful and work well as a unit to build with. When I began using them in the nests, I wasn't at all aware of the dual allusion of bones in that context: my work does not immediately make itself obvious to me. My first bone nest was made within a year of my father's death, but at that time I had convinced myself that I was at peace about his death. Later, I realized I had been trying to pacify myself in denying that I was upset about it.

LK What do you see going on in *Courtship ala Utamaro*?

DH That work was about sexual play, but in retrospect, what a peculiar environment—a bone nest—to put that kind of sexual imagery in. But the only twig nests I did didn't work. I abandoned twig nests after only two pieces.

LK In the *Courtship* piece, I thought the sexual theme juxtaposed with the death theme made the courtship so much more awesome. It played against a cosmic, cyclic background of birth, copulation, and death that would have been totally lacking if you had used twigs for the nest.

DH Yes. With the bones I've found an image that answers many needs the twigs couldn't fulfill. Recently, I've made a transition from using bird bones to making molds from human bones. This brings me even closer to reality.

LK And then you stayed with the nest of bones idea for your installation at Alfred University?

DH My initial interests or themes there were metamorphosis and transition. The nest, winged figure, and feet with wings (Mercury), are all metamorphical images. Then I realized I wanted to separate the audience from the piece for dramatic effect, so I set up a wall with a viewing window. But when you stand behind the wall to look through the window at the work, I later realized, the three dimensional becomes two dimensional. By negating its dimensionality, I had denied some of its potential power. The way I had put it together and taken control, I had denied the very idea of change and movement I had intended to communicate.
When I look at these pictures of the installation now, the nest seems awkward, the winged figure very stylized, and the winged feet don't fly, but are simply suspended in space. It's like a stage set instead of a play.

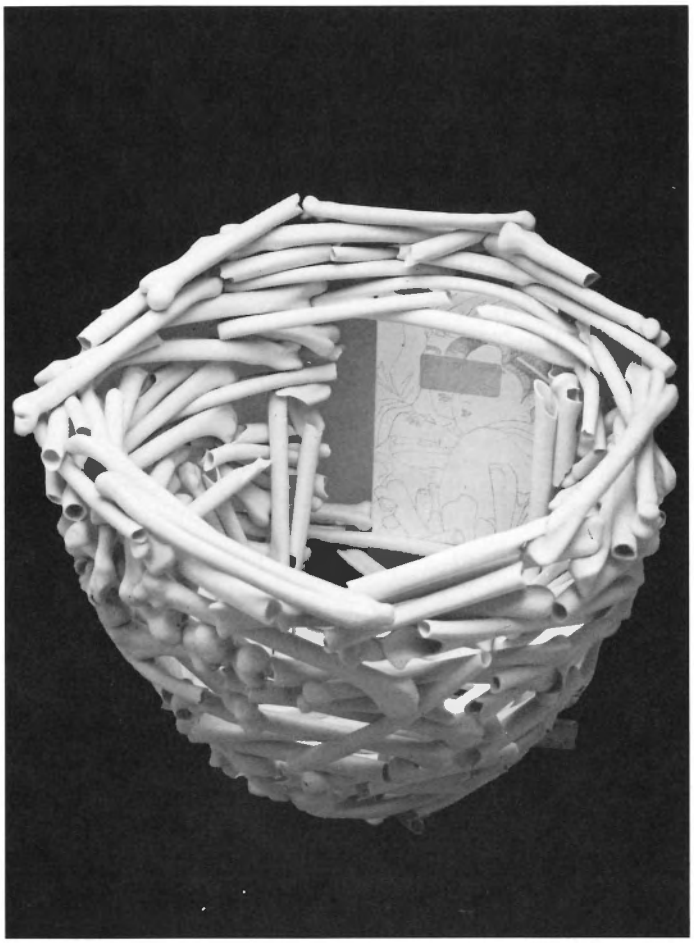
LK For me that's its poignancy and power—it's set up to fly, but doesn't. Wasn't that your point?

DH Not at the time. It's just like when I used the ducks as a symbol of flight, but they really don't go anywhere—again that duplicity of intention and image.

LK But here—flight versus earthbound—I don't think one wins out over the other. I see the very power of your work in that the opposites come so close together. They seem to be in such passionate contradiction.

DH I've learned so much about reality through my art! Looking at the piece now, it seems like the element of control with which I approached it countered its ability to have impact. Also, my crafts orientation—the "perfect object syndrome"—got in the way. I squeezed all the life out of it by trying to perfect it. I want ultimate control, but I don't necessarily have it.

LK But I don't think your conscious intention ever does have complete control over your art.
DH Why?
LK We look at a piece and there's always the counter message that you didn't intentionally put in. Well, okay, you are in control in that you set up the stage, provide the material, but then the thing takes on a life of its own from your unconscious.
DH Yes! That's always been true. For example, in the three geisha portraits, they all took on their own energy. I knew I wanted the arrogant geisha arrogant, but as I worked, she got much more arrogant than I had intended. . . . You see it as a battle between conscious control and unconscious expression?
LK It seems more as if the unconscious has its own viewpoint and likes to add it. You phrase it "either/or," and your unconscious seems to say "both/and." This whole may not be logical, but it's emotionally satisfying because it's complete and intellectually intriguing because the inherent contradictions become an open-ended metaphor. In fact, I think things have more of a chance of having many layers of meaning if they are somehow products of both the conscious and unconscious mind (and I bet Jung would agree!). Does that seem true for you?
DH Yes. Yes. My work is always initially intuitive; then after images are made tangible, I begin to evaluate what it is my unconscious has put together—very similar to dream analysis.
LK What about the humorous pieces? I love *Demure Drop* and *Magic Trick.*
DH The pieces that are basically colorful, attractive, entertaining. I don't find them as demanding and I'm not doing them now.
LK So there are two sorts of transformations in your work: the transformations on the magical, playful side as in these two pieces, and the serious transformations dealing with life, birth, death that we have been discussing. You are only doing the latter now?
DH Maybe because I'm more confrontation-oriented than avoidance-oriented now.
LK You had spoken before of art being an escape and now you aren't using it that way?
DH I now see all those beautiful pieces as just escapes. It relates back to the geisha-duck and all the birds. I was just trying to create a beautiful environment or surrogate entities or friends.
LK And now?
DH My background of making beautiful things is still present, but I'm trying to go beyond that. My idea of transition has changed. Now transition deals with my serious confrontation with being alive.
LK And the implicit, eventual death all living beings will experience?
DH I fluctuate in my response to that question. I will deny that my work suggests a struggle with the reality of death, while realizing that it is undoubtedly a concern. It's the confrontation-avoidance ritual.
LK What about the six-foot-tall nest of bones you made in residency at the Kohler factory last summer?
DH That grew out of my responses to the Alfred installation, and to a recent piece, *Flesh and Bones.* The Kohler piece isn't finished. The nest is complete, but it will have a two-dimensional figure relating to it, as in *Flesh and Bones. Flesh and Bones* is really the climax of all the symbols I've been working with. The



nest is a place of change, the figure with arm turning into wing suggests my interest in transformation from the human into the bird. But in the prototype, I wasn't satisfied with the figure—it seemed static. For this nest, one of the other artists at Kohler traced my shadow onto a slab of clay to create a more fluid, abstracted figure.

LK From using bone marrow as a personal symbol to utilizing your own silhouette—you *are* involving yourself in your work more directly.

DH Also, changing scale changes my experience. It was important to make this nest after the four-and-a-half-foot nest in the Alfred installation. I had felt physically confronted by that nest in a way I hadn't by the nest in *Flesh and Bones,* which is eighteen inches high. I had wanted to see what would happen if I made another beyond my own scale. This one was overwhelming! I had worked on it upside down, in three separate pieces, all summer.

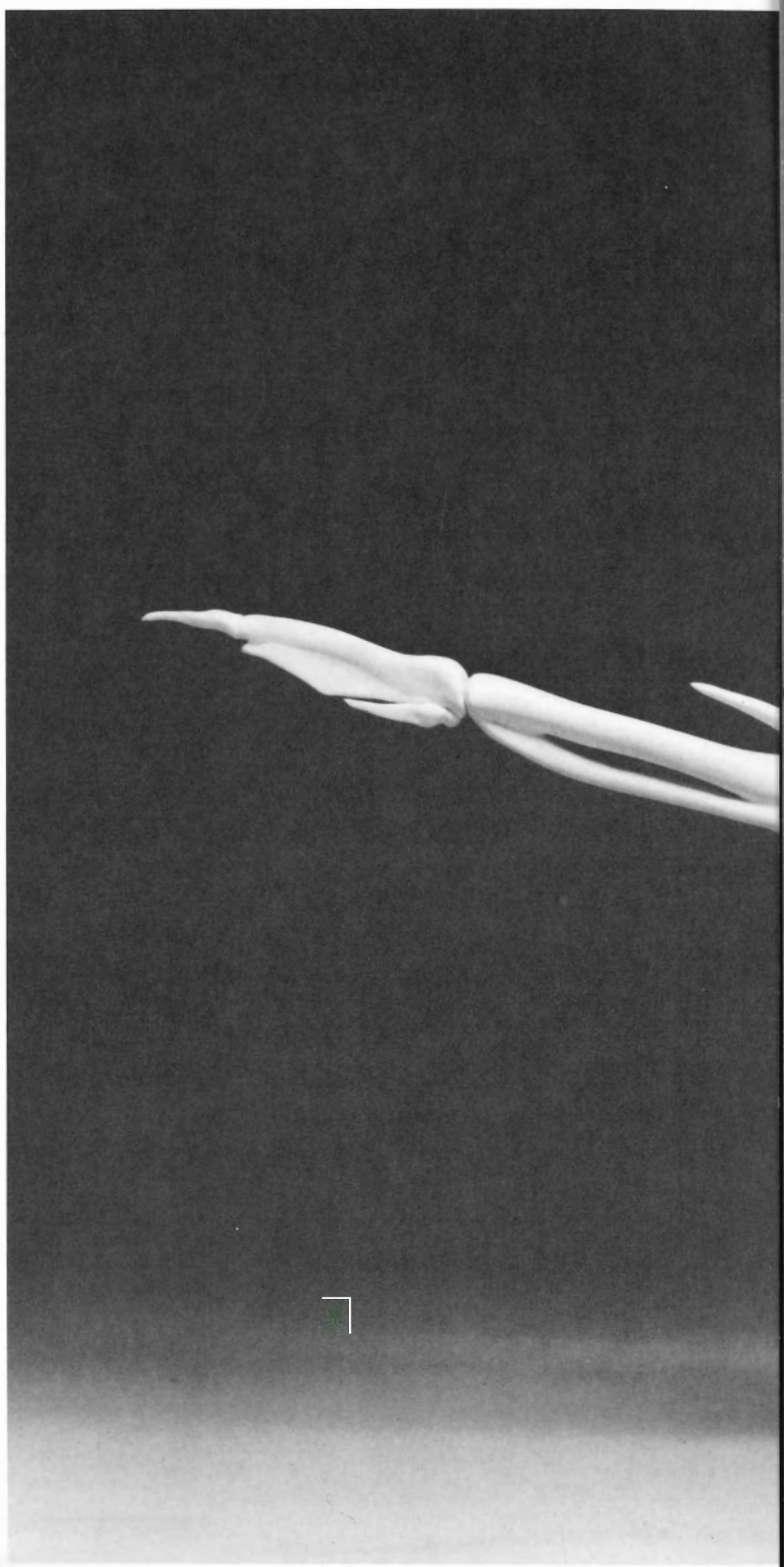
LK As you were working, how did you feel about it?

DH I was thinking it was my own nesting place. But the physical experience of building it was so traumatizing—mass-producing bones and gluing them together around styrofoam cones for two months is absolute tedium! The important moment was when it was turned right side up and became complete and freestanding. Once it was standing, once it was successful, I was too tired to come to any conclusions. I was just stunned. Numb, but ecstatic. It won't be until December when I return to Kohler to resume work on it that I get to figure out if it goes beyond being a physical triumph.

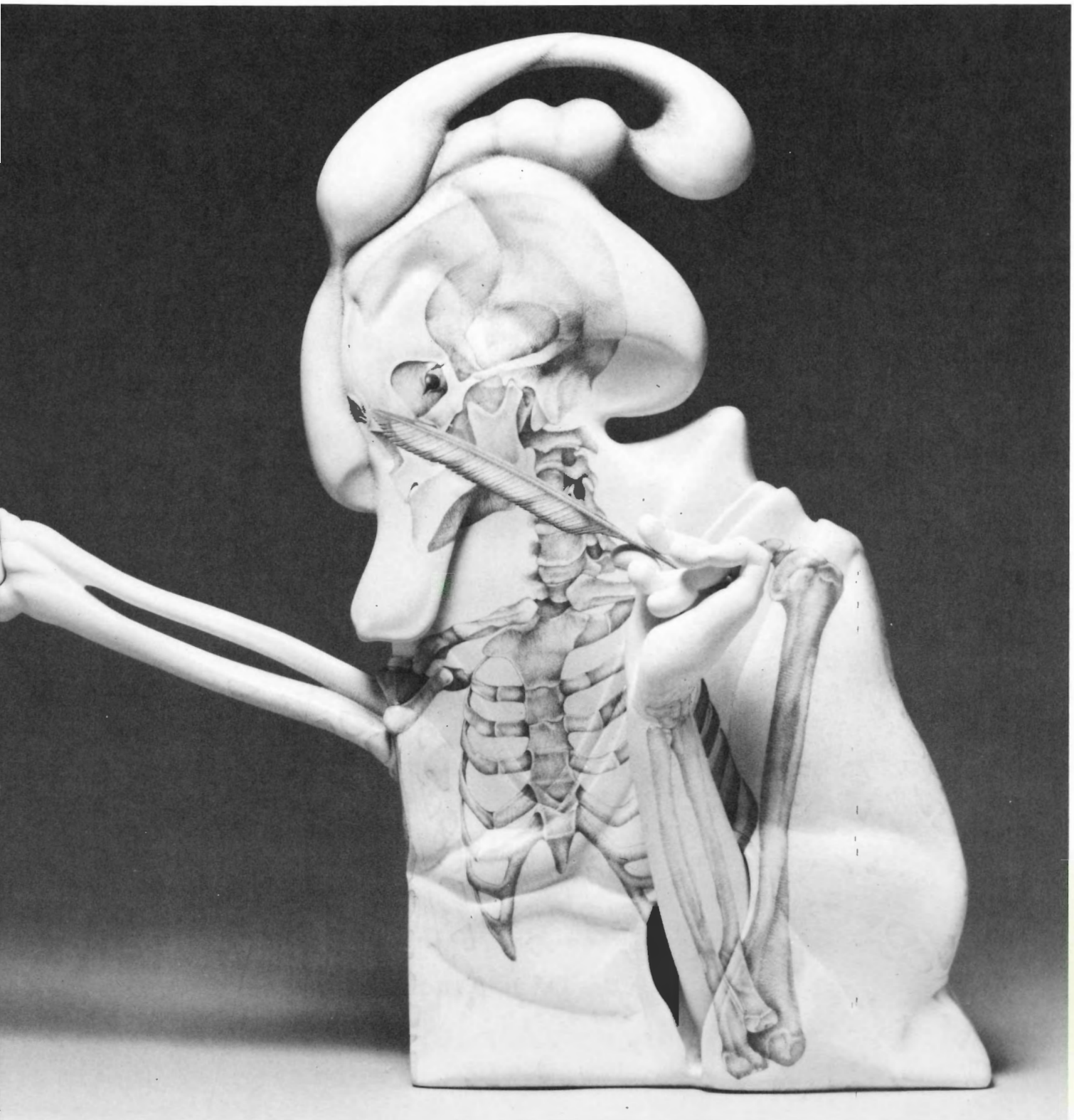
Years ago, when I was applying to grad schools, I sent slides of my work to Robert Arneson. He sent back a postcard saying that from his observation I was working with craft and design, and should now consider scale and environment. I just rediscovered that postcard a few days ago. Wow! At the time, I couldn't relate to that criticism; it just didn't make any sense, but in the last year, that's just what I've been doing. He was perfectly right.

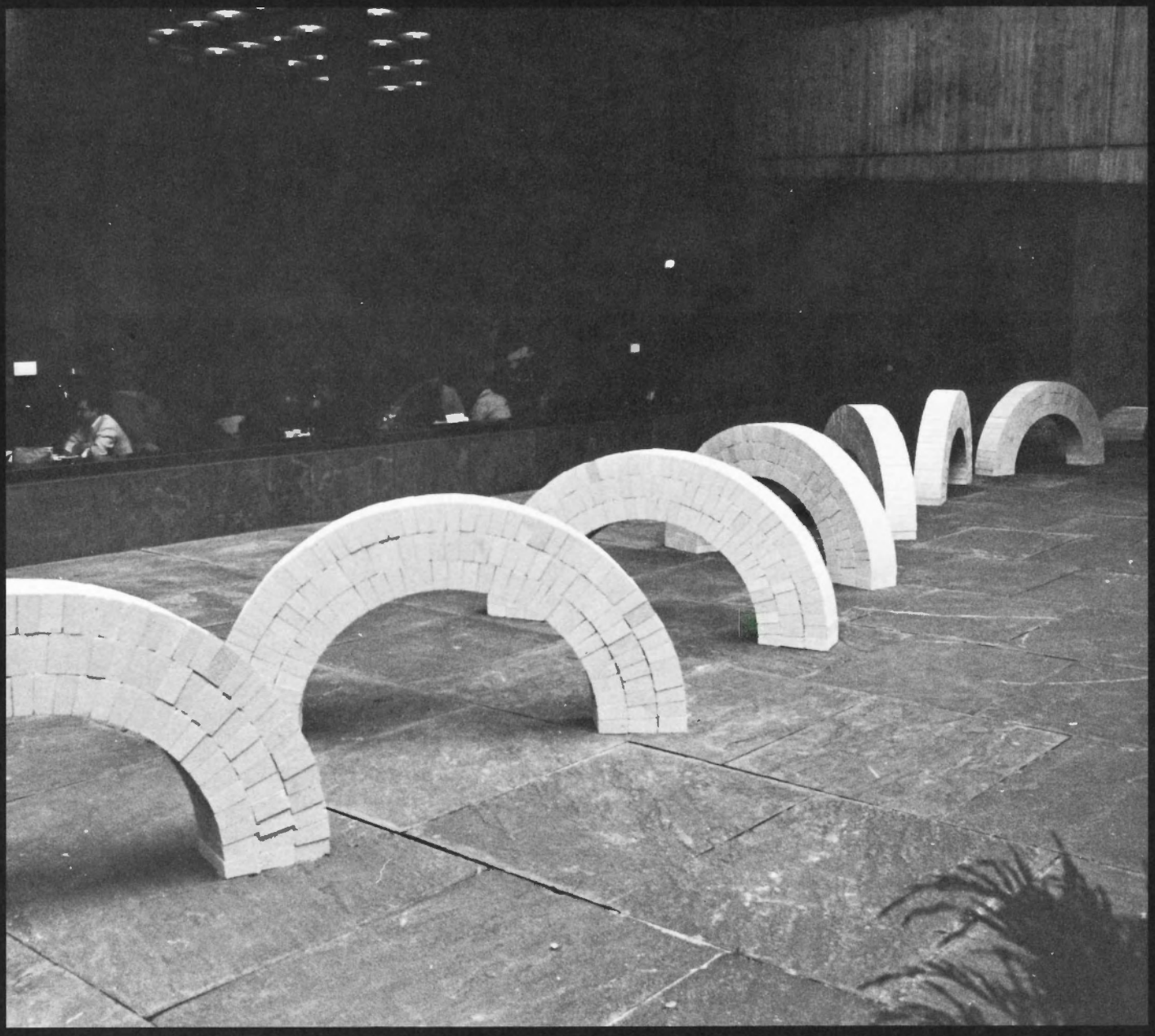
What is presented here as a single conversation actually took place in three sessions stretched over a year: August 1981, June 1982, and September 1982. Deborah Horrell's work will be on view at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin (January 23–March 20).

Louise Klemperer is a freelance writer and teaches design and a seminar on sources of imagery at the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts, Portland.



It's a Question of Identity *(1979), 25" (62.5 cm) high. Photo: Stephen Young.*





In Search of a Transparent Art: John Mason

Jeff Kelley

What appears to be one thing is probably part of something else.
John Mason

Art is a subjective research science. Its forms are reflections on phenomena, sets of marks that parallel the organizing principles of nature, both internal and observed. What Modernism has taught us about truth is that it probably only exists in snatches and, conversely, that what is fleeting to the eye and brain may also be part of a larger pattern.

Scientists suggest that the act of seeing is in itself a kind of truth, an act that determines what is actually seen.[1] The best art, then, is a fragile bridge between the seer and some transitory arrangement of phenomena; it is simply an approach. And critical to our perception of phenomena is evidence, in works of art, of the continuity with which the artist approaches his vision, a continuity which underlies the marks, gestures, fields, and forms with which he responds to the creative process, binding its momentary insights over time. For John Mason, continuity is clarity.

Let me begin in the middle, in the early seventies, when Mason began stacking firebricks in geometric patterns. With this architectonic act, he severed his attachment to the sensuous dance of pottery, for which he was then well known. Mason's exhibition at the Pasadena Museum of Modern Art in the summer of 1974 set the stage for his departure from clay. It included ceramic pot forms of the fifties, dense clay wall reliefs and vertical slab sculptures of the early sixties, as well as a number of somewhat later, massive cross forms. At the end of this sweep lay the firebrick pieces. At the time, it seemed Mason had rejected clay as his medium. In retrospect, the firebrick pieces were the pivotal move in his career, an affirmation of the transparency, rather than the density, of his art.

With clay, Mason had always been interested in the process by which a material retained its original identity while being, at the same time, responsive to the act of manipulation. The record of that manipulation was born by the ceramic object, as its own personal history of marks and scars. But Mason was not an expressionist per se; he had always resisted the liquid marks of emotion which ride ceramic objects like a birthright. His early clay pieces were pinched, pressed, and stacked into some preconceived shape, not deformed in a beautiful fit of emotion. Mason was less interested in clay's poetics than in its subserviance to his ideas; it was the material which best met the conditions of his will. And during the late sixties, when his ideas were increasingly about order, stability, and self-referential forms, Mason saw clay as the medium that best described the tension between surface continuity and the internal order of elegant geometric forms.

His massive ceramic cross forms of the sixties were initially misread as ceramic adaptations of Minimalism, with a Symbolist nod. But they were actually a calculated move toward a simpler language, not based in the expressionist malleability of clay. This is surely one of the potentials of clay: it is a medium of transformation, a stage for the imprint of continuity. And like any legitimate medium, it may be set aside, or even abandoned. What clay did for Mason was to set his ideas in motion, yet outside the aesthetic prerogatives of Expressionism and Minimalism.

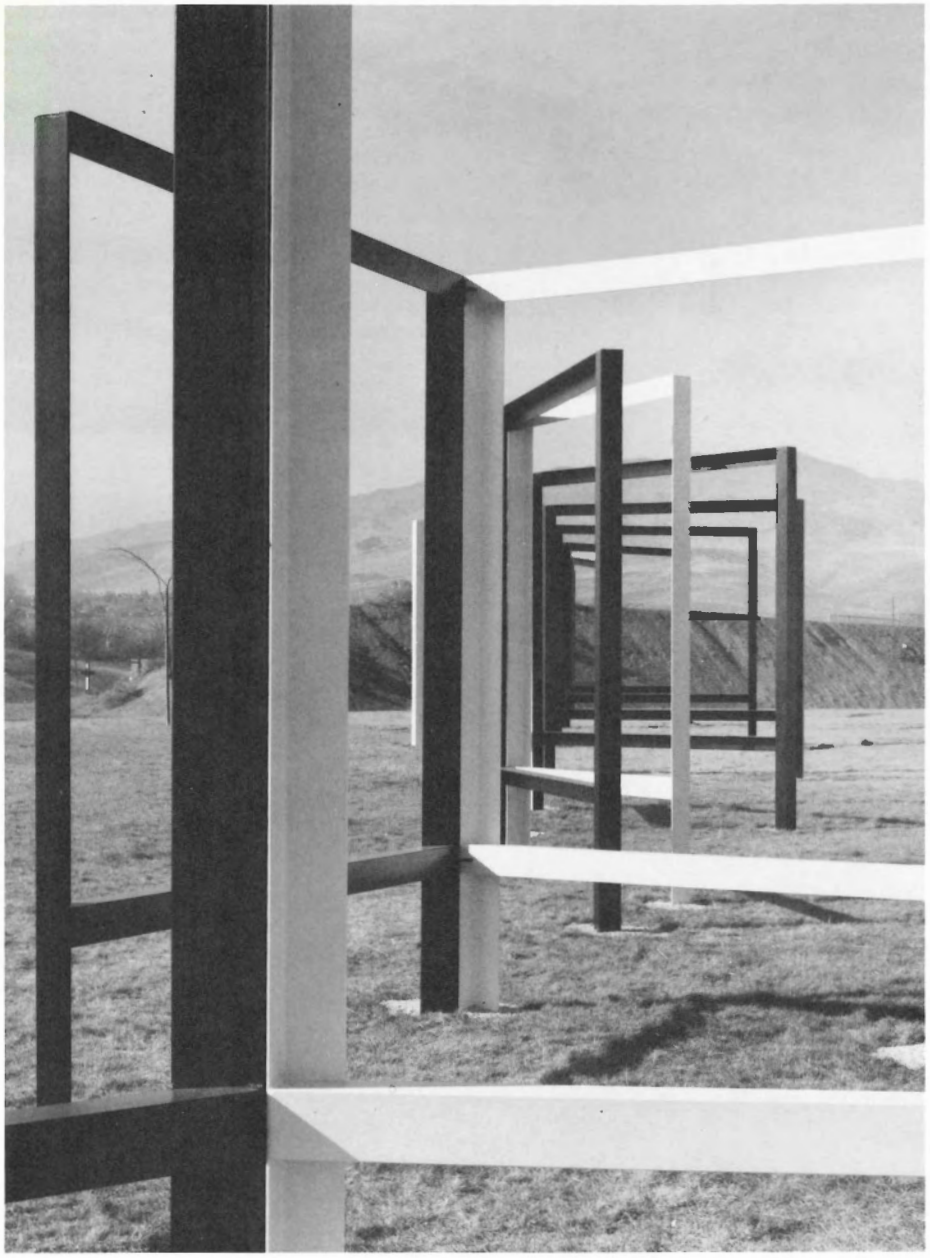
The firebricks did not totally dislodge clay from Mason's *oeuvre* (he still makes ceramic sculpture); nor were they radical penance at the feet of Minimalism, an apology for years of ceramic indulgence, nor even a new direction in imagery. Rather, the act of building firebricks into environmental patterns allowed him to replace the intuitive nature of the ceramic process with an objective process based in the logic of geometry, which became, in turn, the intellectual armature for an intuitive vision.

Mason is essentially a process artist. The point of his work is to maintain the integrity of the glimpse in finished sculptures, to explore the relationship between intuitive fragments and the more stable patterns they suggest. The degree to which he can envision, and control, the development of an orderly idea is also the degree to which he is an idealist. This quest for formal order is based in the notion of equivalence, a process in which the integrity of the whole is ensured by an elegant democracy of its parts.

Mason's sculptures hinge on the preliminary research—usually drawings and maquettes—that generates them. Form is the direct result of the artist's idea of form. A pattern of firebricks on the floor is the completion of an idea which began as a single brick, or as that brick's orientation in space. The development of an idea, of a glimpse into form, gives rise to the tension in Mason's work between its elegant conceptual simplicity and the extreme complexity of the organizing principles his sculpture express.

Complexity is the necessary consequence of aligning one's theoretical constructs with the conditions of the real world. In much modern art, the process of that alignment entails concessions to the inadequacies of the medium or to the artist's own peculiar blindness and vision. Mason's art, however, is not based in personality, although it certainly reflects his penchant for perfection. It is, instead, seeded in a process where all things are equal, where tangential emotions and sidelong glances do not jolt the sweep of a mathematical phrase as it harmonizes with the conditions and limitations of a given

Twelve Arches *(1981), installed at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.*



environment. If that phrase, that fragment, is truly stable at its source, it will become a stage for the diversity of perception. The process by which fragments are born into sculptures is, in fact, the subject of Mason's work.

In the firebrick pieces, Mason found a process in which methodology and finished object were synonymous. That methodology was, as Rosalind Krauss has pointed out, architectonic.[2] The primitive associations of clay were now expressed in terms of a modern, modular, yet timeless human act: the act of building. With ceramic objects, Mason's sense of measure had been self-contained; with the firebricks, it became progressive and permutative, a reflection on the currents of logic. But more importantly, the bricks were the literal building blocks of both internal structure and the continuity of surface, the bridge between sensuality and hidden mathematical order.

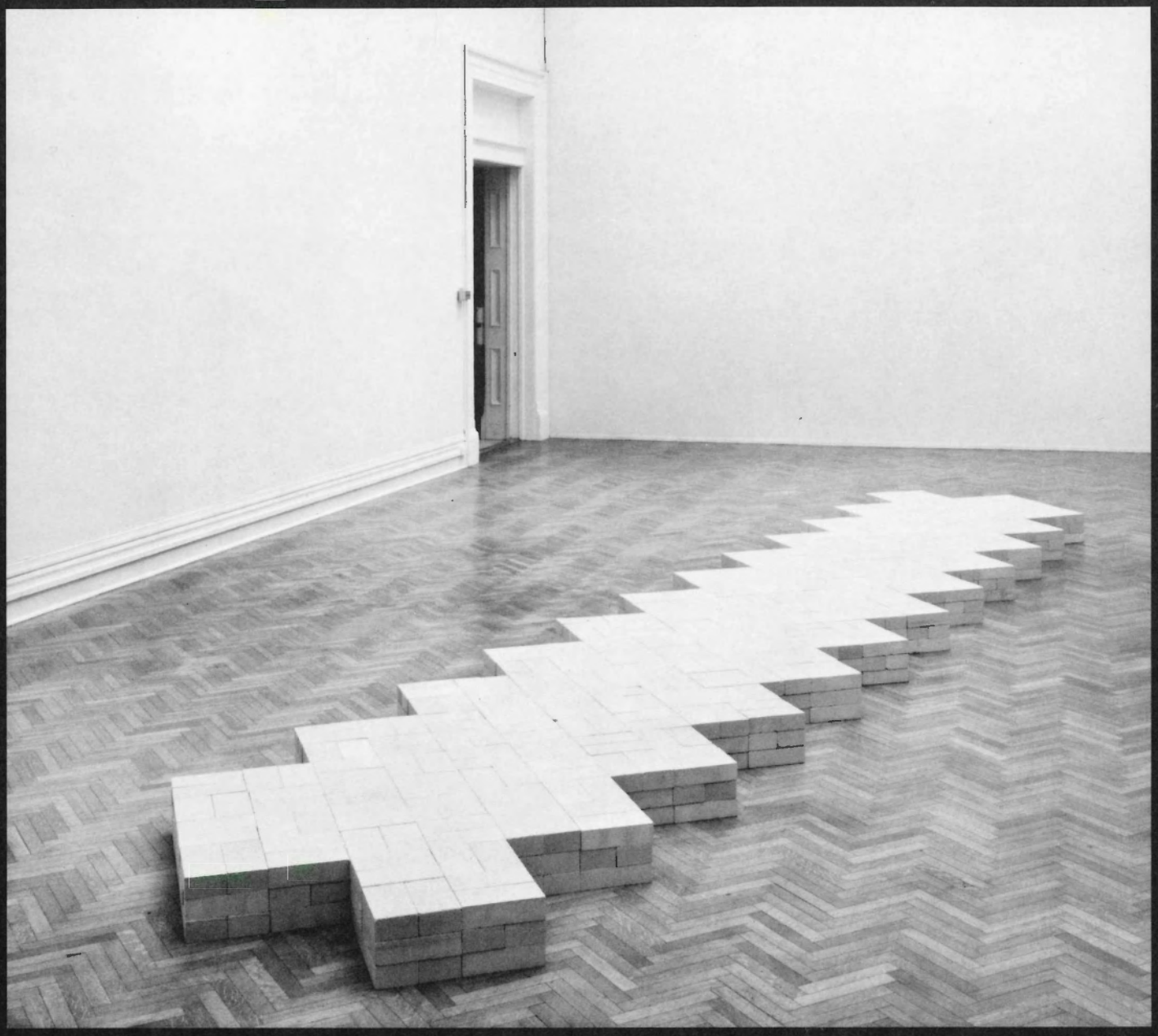
For Mason, the firebrick was the perfect module for a transparent art, where surface permutations—the chance consequence of each brick's variability—were a direct expression of a conceptual center. The striking paradox is that the modules of that process, the individual bricks, were stacked intuitively, without regard to the conceptual orientation of the larger pattern. Thus, the suggestion of a warm human hand could be found in the ambient golden colors and textural variations of the bricks. If the patterns expressed an extra-human order, the placement of each brick was a reflection of human intuition, the humanity of logic expressed through the building process.

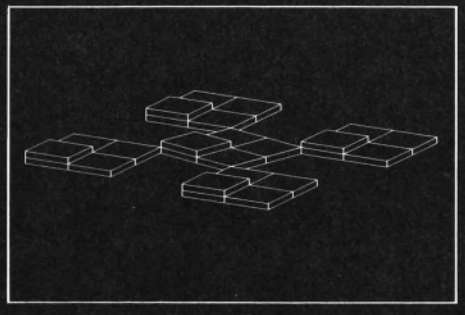
The *Hudson River Series,* ten firebrick installations which wandered across six museum spaces in 1978, was both a vast extension of a limited conceptual premise and a series of eccentric, intimate experiences. Based on three specific angles of orientation Mason observed in his

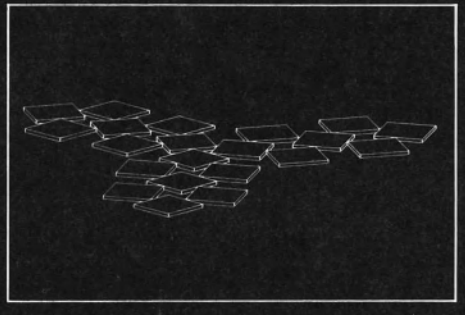
The Peavine Installation *(1979), at the University of Nevada-Reno, 8′ (2.4 m) high, painted steel. Photo: Bob Griffin.*

Hudson River Series VIII *(1978), installed at Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Photo: Paul Kennedy.*

Drawings for Hudson River Series III and II *(1978). Photos: Nathan Rabin.*







Hudson River Series X *(1978), installed at Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Photo: Paul Kennedy.*

Hudson River Series III *(1978), installed at Des Moines Art Center, Iowa. Photo: Reed Estabrook.*

(Following page) Hudson River Series II *(1978), installed at Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Photo: Paul Kennedy.*

drawings, the series became an explication of the relationship between source and permutation. Each specific sculpture emphasized some quirky geometric fact, whether stable and mandalic or seeming to spin and pivot across the floor, and which could be traced directly to its fragmentary source.

Those source images, for Mason, are usually first suggested in his drawings, the ongoing bases of his research. At this level, the artist's eye is peeled for a flickering organizational integrity that is both aesthetically appealing and suggestive of some larger paradigm. But the process of pushing that insight into a relationship with a specific space or outdoor site is where pure research becomes applied science. Indeed, the poetic tensions generated between the individual *Hudson River* sculptures and the arches, columns, colors, and floor patterns of the museum spaces they inhabited helped reveal the dormant potency of the architectural patterns of each site. In short, Mason translates his ideas into human scale. And it is at this moment—when such factors as weight, light, and patterns of human movement are suddenly among the measures by which each sculpture is perceived—that theory, just as suddenly, becomes art.

This tension between the internal dynamics of a sculpture and its environment has been a major concern of Mason's more recent work. In his *Peavine Installation* in Reno, Nevada, for example, a black and white coding system was painted on slender steel bars that stand up off the ground like frames. By reinforcing certain internal counter-movements, the sculpture is more intimately responsive to its hilltop site. In fact, the series of revolving frames becomes a cinematic description of the peculiarities of the light, space, and architecture of the local environment, as well as an expression of the way in which motion defines and freezes what we see. With the *Peavine Installation,* Mason translated the implied motion of his firebrick floor patterns into a transparent, upright matrix within which humans could wander. It is within those patterns of movement and shifting focus that an intimacy—which is the consequence of coming into balance with the unseen, but deeply present, mathematics of the piece—occurs between viewer and environment. Therein lies the humanity of Mason's work.

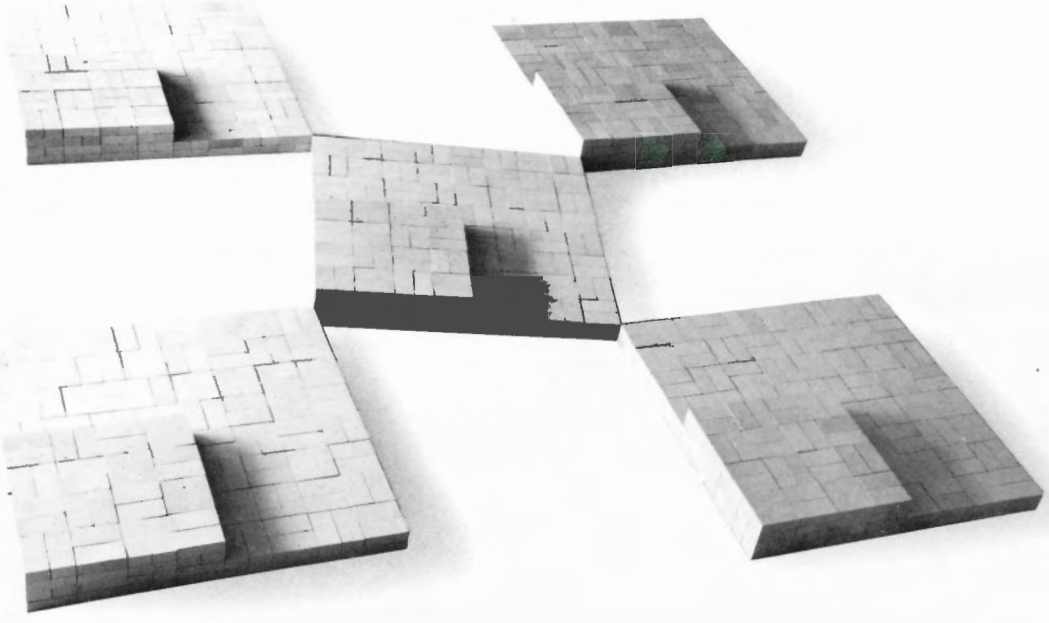
Critic Robert McDonald ended his analysis of Mason's *Hudson River Series VIII* by admitting the inadequacy of analysis in matters of art.[3] Aesthetic satisfaction is not a consequence of scientific analysis, but of a visionary override of the facts. I suspect what is ultimately so satisfying about Mason's art, beyond its visual elegance, is its intrinsic sense of equivalence, where no part is more important than another, where the whole is an extension of what stands before us into something visionary. Mason does not editorialize on his art with emotion, however. He allows intuition to override calculation, as it will inevitably do. In the final analysis, Mason's art is deeply eccentric, as it ultimately reflects some conceptual quirk, perhaps the offset orientation of a triangle or a brick. It is also curiously elusive, even as it cuts loose a fleeting order from chaos.

There is a Platonic notion of Ideal Forms, the archetypal standards toward which humans attempt profane replication. Well, perhaps what we have learned from the modern era is that the Forms do not exist, at least not as wholes. Instead, we have learned to gaze upon fragments, to break down experience into meaningful continuums, to posture ourselves before an ideal. Art is no longer a grand conclusion, but an approach. John Mason's art suggests the Forms, not as stable, unchanging standards, but as transitory patterns, as delicately balanced matricies subject to changing human perception. What we suspect, we explore; what we find, we express. The exploration is stable. The expression is not.

I recently visited Mason's Los Angeles studio, where a particular drawing caught my eye. It was somehow busier than the rest; it was not a diagram, not a meditation on some fleeting glimpse or some transitory geometric truth. It was, instead, just research: a pentagonal table for the systematic mixing of glazes. A little alchemy, both perfect and insane, designed to leave nothing to chance except those final, hot moments in the kiln, which require only faith . . . and a mixing chart.

1. Werner Heisenberg's "Principle of Uncertainty."
2. Rosalind Krauss, "John Mason and Post-Modernist Sculpture: New Experiences, New Words." *Art in America,* May/June 1979, pp. 120–27.
3. Robert McDonald, "John Mason: Structure and Space." *Artweek,* September 9, 1978.

Jeff Kelley, artist and critic, is contributing editor to Artweek *and is currently living in Reno, Nevada.*



JOHN MASON
INSTALLATIONS FROM
THE HUDSON RIVER SERIES

A Way of Seeing
Part Two

Mark Anderson

Dictionaries usually define art by listing commonly associated activities: drawing, painting, sculpture, and so on. A sentence relating to form, beauty, and aesthetics is often added. Contemporary art has utilized many mediums and activities for the purpose of artistic expression; so that "crafts" and "craft activities" are also now commonly considered to be in the realm of art. It follows that the lexicographic list of activities lengthens to a point at which the definition becomes both cumbersome and vague.

The first essay in this series attempted to circumvent the inadequacy of such definitions by exploring the meanings of art and craft in a social context. In so doing, a basic proposition emerged: art's essential element is its communicative content, rather than the artistic vehicle, the medium, or activity which expresses the sentiment.

Expanding the notion of art as communication leads us to question the dictionary's accuracy. An examination of the economic, social, and political structure of what is called "art" shows the dictionary to be not only vague, but misleading. By attempting to define the categories within art in finite terms, all linguistic accuracy is lost. As a result, the terminology of art becomes a matter of individual choice.

It has been argued that aesthetics are a minor element in art, since aesthetic concerns are common to many other aspects of life. Why then should "fine" (purely aesthetic) art be considered of more value or superior to other types of art? The words "fine" and "pure," and the accompanying implications of perfection, refinement, elegance, and so on, evoke images of cultural or qualitative superiority.

Again, the obsession with common but superficial characteristics has led to an inadequate way of distinguishing between "fine" art and other presumably lesser categories. While some dictionaries compare "fine" art to "useful" art, it is more relevant to compare fine art to folk art, popular art, and primitive art, since "useful" art is seldom defined.

Historically, fine art has propagated ideologically positive sentiments to the world at large. Thus, it conformed to the aesthetic dictates of the commissioning party. It might then be assumed that commissioned fine art is aesthetically (and by implication, qualitatively) superior to art not commissioned by that party. Such was the case with feudal societies, in which the aristocracy and the religious hierarchy were in control of the greatest part of the wealth. Painting, sculpture, and drawing were their safe property and expressed directly their values and ideals, since the rest of society had neither the resources nor the time to engage in the production of art, unless commissioned to do so.

However, the Industrial Revolution's radical alteration of both economic structure and social organization generated changes in the role of art. It is the aim of this essay to trace these changes to show that society unjustifiably continues to term "fine art" that which ostensibly conforms to traditional fine-art standards. Secondly, it will propose that fine art's social significance has diminished with the absence of a coherent ruling ideology, and that the most significant contributions to contemporary art will come from the areas of popular and folk art.

An art object does not sustain life in the practical sense that food, tools, and craft objects do. In keeping with its ability to communicate and to record, to "concretize" fictional and abstract concepts, art has most often been utilized as a means of "spiritual survival"—providing humankind its reason for being and its place in the order of things. In hierarchical societies, it is customary for the ruling class to appropriate the surplus product in return for maintaining "spiritual security." While a certain part of this maintenance consists of law enforcement, order is primarily maintained through ideological means: religious or moral codes, constitutions or a combination thereof. The ideological apparatus generally consists of social institutions: family, educational systems, churches, and communications networks.

Hierarchies throughout history have frequently adopted and

sponsored artistic communication as a means of ideological perpetuation. In ancient Greece, for instance, all art was commissioned by the state. Religion has dominated the art of virtually all pre-industrial societies. More recent examples of the exertion of strict ideological sanctions on art are to be found in the fascist states of twentieth-century Europe and, to this day, in the Soviet Union. The principal elements on which an ideology is founded are commonly expressed through fine art, and through literature and the performing arts.

Significant to this concept of ideology and art was the Industrial Revolution's shift of power from the aristocracy and the church to the owners of capital. The accompanying revolution in education and science and the change of emphasis from spiritual to material explanations of existence radically altered the content and subject matter of art. At the same time, as a consequence of the advances in communications technology, cinema, radio and television, photography, and various other mediums have replaced much of the ideological significance of the traditional fine art mediums. As advanced, complex, and capital intensive as the production of these new art forms are, they have become the safe property of those with power, just as painting, sculpture, and architecture had been the safe property of those who could retain artists.

It is easily seen that these new mediums excelled in fulfilling certain propositions: that art should refer to the general through the specific, that art is likely to be best understood in a stylized context, that the value of a communication increases with the time and to the extent to which it is understood. However, the potential of technologically advanced fine art to be a monolithic tool of propaganda has been thwarted on two counts, as has all modern fine art.

First, fine art must deal with the plurality of values and cultures dependent upon each other within the diplomatic "global village" of modern society. Linked to this is the democratic notion of education as the quest for and exploration of a broad sphere of knowledge and values. No longer do the most advanced communications within the control of a hierarchy share one ideology; rather, they are influenced by a large number of frequently conflicting ideologies with a common economic goal.

Second, through increasing mechanization and labor-saving technology, those mediums historically associated with fine art are now more accessible to the independent artist, who, in our pluralistic society, may choose to confront the ruling ideology.

Fine art has been forced to become ideologically neutral in order to diplomatically appease the conflicting ideologies of those who hold power. By merit of its ideological neutrality, traditional fine art is praiseworthy from the establishment's point of view. But from an objective viewpoint, popular art is more praiseworthy; it's partisan viewpoints more directly communicate its content. Thus a further conflict arises between that which is poignant and that which is "in line."

This conflict was well illustrated by Robert Arneson's memorial to the late San Francisco mayor, George Moscone. First of all, clay is not generally associated with fine art in Western civilization; as a sculptural medium, it has none of the permanence of bronze, marble, or steel. More importantly, although Arneson is a highly respected artist, his work frequently plays on social taboos. Given that the purpose of a memorial bust is to immortalize a moral authority or respected figure and given the nature of Arneson's work, it is curious that the authorities commissioned him. The finished work, which immortalized both the assassinated mayor and the assassin, shocked some of the commissioners. The resultant controversy demonstrated the obvious shortcomings of commissioning a critical artist to produce fine art.

By contrast, clay has been proven an acceptable bridge between painting and architecture as fine art. Ruth Duckworth's ceramic wall piece, *Clouds over Lake Michigan,* provided the anonymity, neutrality, and formal conservatism fitting to a corporate commission.

This would indicate that a medium's conformity to the established standards with respect to the form, content, and material properties of fine art guarantees its acceptance as fine art. This notion has been consistently confirmed by recent exhibitions purporting to herald ceramic art's acceptance into the established artworld. What has been accepted so far is clay masquerading as highly textured pigment or as ceramic sculpture within the safe confines of protected institutions. Invariably, the work is identifiable with an already established and respected movement and represents a middle ground between what is acceptable to the establishment and what stands as the eloquence and popular appeal of ceramic art in its own right. While it is wrong to condemn the legitimacy being offered ceramic art by the establishment, it is important to be cognizant of the compromise such legitimacy exacts.

There is a certain artistic degeneration when ceramics conforms to the neutrality of contemporary fine art. Painting and drawing have virtually exhausted themselves in terms of their ultimate fine art abstractions—Photorealism and Minimalism. Can fine art continue to produce devotional works for nondenominational temples? Is fine art condemned to Howard Becker's tawdry realm—"objects of aesthetic contemplation, of collection and ostentatious display . . . of investment and pecuniary gain?"

It may continue to explore other mediums in an attempt to extend its guaranteed ultimate redundancy. But ceramic walls and monumental weavings and other grandiose evocations of elemental concepts become an extension of the ideological no man's land where corporate conglomerates and artists meet. Ultimately, such fine art meets with decorative art; the creation of things for things' sake, as communicative as loose change in a commuter's pocket.

Given that ceramic art sits on the borderline between establishment legitimacy (with its pressure towards neutrality) and popular legitimacy (which offers considerably less chance of great economic gain), it would appear that ceramic artists face a choice. The choice is largely a matter of individual preference, although the ideological prejudice against clay outside the corporate restroom puts the ceramic fine artist at an immediate disadvantage. The prejudice bears considerable resemblance to that directed towards rock music by the establishment, and the parallels frequently drawn by writers in this magazine are indeed valid.

Most rock music is rooted in folk and popular cultures. Although the end result may not have a recognizable source in any one culture, its elemental appeal remains. Frequently, however, as popular appeal of rock music is established, the regeneration of raw sentiments it expresses is watered down to appeal to larger audiences. Arneson wisely resisted pleas to remove the offensive parts from his Moscone bust to make it "acceptable." But much of the offensive originality of rock music *has* been neutralized. The Beatles' initial spontaneity and integrity was conveniently maneuvered into a miasma of clichés and philharmonic strings by their imitators. The anger of Punk Rock was hastily quashed and repackaged in the more palatable New Wave.

The major difference between rock music and ceramic art is that the latter has tended to follow mainstream art movements at a safe distance, rather than generate its own dynamics. It has emulated fine art and popular art through belated -isms and through follow-the-leader avant-gardism—resulting in less-than-adventurous repackaging of the same content. If ceramic art is to establish artistic credibility outside its own field, it must cease to be a last stop on the line of mediums utilized by other art movements. It must then attempt to exude emotions and energy, rather than be a part of the process to neutralize them.

This is the second in a series of articles on the sociology of art and craft (see "A Way of Seeing," American Ceramics *1/3). Potter Mark Anderson was born in Britain, where he studied sociology and philosophy at the University of Surrey. He now writes and works in clay with Byron Temple in Lambertville, New Jersey.*

Reconstructing with Shards

Robert C. Morgan

half of a plate
an edge of a cup

fragments that I call my room

Stephen Wedgley[1]

In the early sixties, there were rumors that legendary country western singer Dusty Springfield had hysterical fits in which she would hurl stacks of plates, cups, and saucers against the wall. Eccentric to be sure, even a bit self-destructive. Perhaps this was her necessary way of relieving anxiety, of dealing with the pressures of the recording industry, the endless studio sessions, the concert tours that collided with Dusty's domestic urges.

Imitation china became the object of her strife. Did she need to hear the crash of plates, to see the shards pile up on the floor? Was this a violent means of releasing violence, of coping with her professionally prescribed status as sex symbol?

Shards such as these do not require an archaeologist's training to be understood. The evidence points to a more subjective response, a more immediate psycho-social dilemma—a phenomenon of the American psyche.

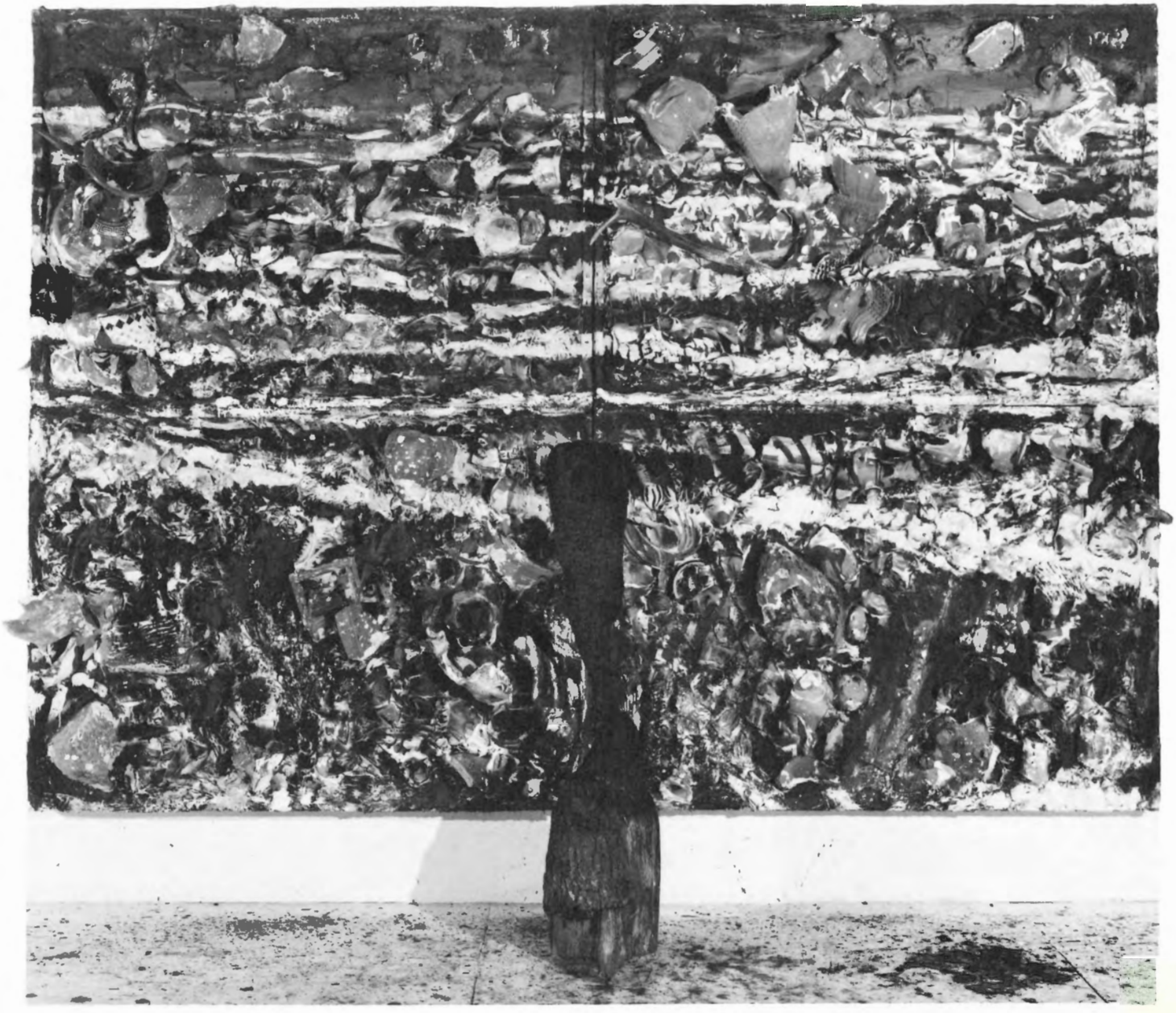
The experience of seeing broken shards, regardless of how they are composed or scattered about, is scarcely neutral. We associate certain plates, cups, and bowls with sentimental occasions, with certain intimate relationships, and with special events. We touch them repeatedly with our hands and mouths. These domestic items are cherished, utilized, and exhibited in a variety of contexts.

In order to gain some perspective on the intimacy of feelings associated with contemporary ceramics and moldware, it is helpful to compare their utilitarian functions with those in cultures removed from our own. The Mimbres tribes in New Mexico—whose potters and painters were most fecund roughly between AD 1000–1250—regarded the ceremonial purposes of their craft and pictorial designs in a highly conscious and systematic manner.[2] Of the many light and dark, geometric variations now extant, the representations of animals and humans seem to convey the greatest poignancy. The ritualistic piercing of the bowl through its center—the symbolic breaking of the bond these wares held on the spirit of the deceased—carried an important ceremonial meaning. The fact that Mimbres pottery had practical as well as ceremonial utility was significant.[3] By piercing the center of the bowl prior to burial, the vessel no longer had a worldly utility; breaking the bowl gave it an aura of transcendent materialism, a spiritual life beyond its utilitarian dimension. In breaking the Mimbres bowl, these shamans performed a kind of exorcism.

Shards are historically important. They are the raw materials for archaeologists working on excavation sites throughout Mesoamerica and the Middle East. Historians trained in archaeology "read" these shards in order to conceptualize their original intentions. By adhering fragments back together, historians speculate on the significance of their ceramic utility in societies which have long since disappeared. This process of "reconstruction" is highly scientific. The aesthetic component is determined only after the fact, that is, after the reconstruction process has occurred. The philosopher Ortega y Gasset once cited a curious analogy:

You might say that before men began to think, reason was broken into bits, and thereafter men had to go about picking up the pieces one by one and putting them together. Simmel talks about a "broken-plate society" that existed in Germany at the end of the last century. Some friends at the conclusion of a commemorative dinner decided to break a plate and to divide the pieces, each one agreeing to surrender his piece to one of his friends upon his death. In this manner the fragments gradually fell into the hands of the last survivor, who was able to reconstruct the plate.[4]

To some extent, the present generation of artists, whose awareness of history is largely media generated, has lost touch with the historical and psychological impact which the discovery and reconstruction of shards has had upon former generations. It is now the rare historian who regards his subject solely from its traditional viewpoint, as being a body of linear facts about past cultures, societies, or events. History as a concept is gradually becoming more and more layered and open to broader interpretations. Evidence from the past, such as the Mimbres bowls, is observed from the point of view of the present, and the present scrutinized from perspectives of the past. Indeed, information today is accumulated as fast as it is communicated—distilling opposites and contradictions and formulating new syntheses as quickly as the evidence can be apprehended. And yet,



Sea *(1981) by Julian Schnabel, 108" x 56" (270 x 140 cm), oil, pots/plaster, wood. Courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, New York. Photo: Alan Zindman.*

Pharoh's Daughter *(1966) by Carolee Schneemann, 20" (50 cm) high, wooden box, lights, slides, paint, clock. Courtesy Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York. Photo: Eric Pollitzer.*

our sense of purpose in relation to these instantaneous gathering, storage, and retrieval processes is possibly less apparent than ever before. Information alone does not make history, any more than works of art, in themselves, determine the history of art.

It is questionable whether the Mimbres decorators regarded their wares as artistic expressions in the same way we regard art today. It is more likely that their images held a more direct social significance, a value intrinsically bound to the cultural, spiritual, and ceremonial contexts which informed their making. They addressed both a practical and spiritual utility. The decorations on pots, bowls, and plates not only narrated events, but symbolized attributes of the universe in relation to the community. Not isolated as "art," the decorations were informed by a cultural matrix of beliefs, customs, and experience. So we have seen that shards have historical significance for the scientist, archaeologist, and historian, who depend upon their structural evidence to trace the course of human development in a specific place over a particular period of time. The other perspective, however, concerns the present—shards seen not in relation to distant cultures, but manipulated to communicate more contemporary sensibilities, often wrought with hysteria and violence.

The emotional effect of glass shards is quite different from that of broken pottery. Whether broken or unbroken, glass has the capability to incite expressive, psychological meaning. Shards of glass are more visibly threatening. They have the potential to incise human flesh. Glass is a translucent, fragile substance. It can both reflect and direct the passage of light. Duchamp chose glass as the material for his early masterwork so that his images could float in space without the problem of a background. The art collector Katherine Dreier reported that when the *Large Glass* was broken during shipment, Duchamp eagerly embraced the opportunity to reconstruct the pieces, claiming this destiny as part of his theory of chance operations.[5]

In contrast to the assemblages of Joseph Cornell, the boxed constructions of Carolee Schneemann have none of the smooth uniformity of the former's fastidiously placed *objets trouvés.* In *Sea Level* and in *Gift Science* (both 1965),[6] any notion of

centralized imagery has been obliterated. Instead, the viewer's eye confronts densely packed interiors in wooden boxes, accented with paint, driftwood, shards of broken glass, discarded flashbulbs, and wads of magnetic tape. There is a hint of order within chaos. Visual and tactile textures converge in a sensuous whole that suggests a delicate balance between intellect and emotion. Her boxes read as compressions of many moods and feelings —rather than as a single record or document of an event—which have found some material manifestation within a disturbing and intimate space.

On the spectrum between artifact and ritual, Carolee Schneemann's work moves closer to the latter. It conveys rites of passage—particularly in reference to the emerging secularization of women—as expressed through metaphor and symbol. Closer to the other end of the spectrum, ceramic sculptor Judy Moonelis leans toward the abstraction of artifacts, namely, ceramic shards that serve as iconic references to recent postwar culture. She is interested in the garishly glazed moldware mass produced during the fifties, the kind found frequently in thrift stores.[7] Moonelis breaks the moldware into shards and assimilates the pieces into trapezoidal earthenware forms, usually elevated on four stilts.

Moonelis's ceramic constructions have a kind of awkward funerary look about them. The moldware shards are less threatening than the glass shards of Schneemann, with a greater emphasis put upon the purely decorative qualities of the broken elements. In an untitled work of 1980, for example, the arbitrary placement of the shards diminishes their historical reference. In more recent works, the decoration is less literal, with more attention paid to a kind of anthropomorphism.

George Woodman's essay on the concept of ceramic decoration suggests that the decorator's task always moves in one direction—toward resolving the appearance of the ceramic object.[8] This single-minded search for composition through decoration occurs regardless of the categories set forth by Woodman to distinguish between various conceptual differences and ideologies; that is, the ceramic object always precedes the painted imagery on its surface. The fact that the decoration always appears on the surface of the pot, and that the pot never appears on the surface of the decoration, is more than a semantic issue. I immediately asked myself: Is there not a single artist working today who may have reversed this process, thus solving the problem from a different angle entirely? The answer to my question came last summer with a recent "plate painting" by Julian Schnabel.

Schnabel began using broken plates in two heavily impastoed paintings in the fall of 1978. In one of these, *The Death of Fashion,* the plate shards literally engulf the visual field. Occasionally covered with pigment, but more often embedded into the mass of pigment surrounding them, the shards evoke an abstract decentralization. *The Death of Fashion* really extends the vocabulary of the early Abstract Expressionists' cubist rhetoric in terms of a completely demystified snythetic mode. The distancing of the painterly application and the calculated composition of the plates and shards removes Schnabel's intention from the domain of expressivity, a label which has been mistakenly attached to these highly and supremely decorative fields of pictorial indulgence.

Although inspired by Antonio Gaudí's architectural surrealism, seen in the summer prior to the first plate paintings,[9] Schnabel's inspiration two years earlier had been of a more canine variety. In excerpts from an interview published in 1975, Schnabel made the following observation:

The image of a space, like being a dog in a revolving door, is one that we all can experience; like if you don't have enough cash to go where you want to go. It's like being incapacitated, you find yourself in a position where you're just stopped, like inertia, like being a dog in a revolving door. Focusing on where you are, not where you want to be.[10]

The curious existential anxiety manifested in this statement, combined with an oblique reference to the "revolving door" series of paintings by Man Ray (not to mention William Wegman's dog "Man Ray," suggests a condition of angst implicit in the more recent plate and pot tableaux. In reflecting upon Gaudí, Schnabel describes what could be interpreted as a Post-Modern epiphany: "it had a certain kind of reflective quality and density of color and light which I felt hadn't really been used in painting, that was sort of off the ground and had a . . . pictorial quality. Besides, a psychological one."[11] More specifically in reference to the use of plates, Schnabel remarked:

Well, I mean it's the way the plate functions in the world. It's sort of treating it like junk, in a way, like stuff . . . It's like pointing out something you're going to disregard. And then the plates create a kind of surface when they're painted over. It's about usage, it marks a place in history. And the paintings get used also, I see them as tools.[12]

Although Schnabel began working more explicitly with the figure in 1980, in such paintings as *St. Francis in Ecstacy, What to Do with a Corner in Madrid (Part 2),* and *Untitled Aborigine Painting,* the plates were used mainly as a textural grounding, a formal device to which his pigment adhered. The odd contradiction between the shard elements and the figures represented over them imbued these paintings with psychological insight or penetration, despite their acclaimed formal intention. The overlaying juxtaposition between texture and image sets up a forceful uniformity that can easily be mistaken as rehashed expressionism. Certainly the angst of Schnabel's "revolving door" conundrum is still present, with all its emotional suggestiveness, but there is a quality of chic commentary upon commercial subculture that projects the "message" of the paint beyond the interior vision.

The most recent paintings, of enormous scale and ambition, use shards of dime-store imitation Mesoamerican pots, some chipped and broken, others fully encrusted into the deep pigment as if to depict an archaeological diorama. Nevertheless, a painting such as *The Sea* (1981) carries some of the force formerly found only in the early work of Pollock. Its rich visual textures rehearse new possibilities for abstract field painting, but without the thinly stained veils and marks identified with postpainterly abstraction. In *The Sea,* the bifurcated panels of chaotic texture and broken pottery are unified through the erotic placement of a burnt driftwood log that had been propped against the median line. This natural sculptural device establishes an immediate figure-to-ground reference. The angst, however, reflected in

The Sea's turbulent striations of waves, is not of the typical expressionist variety. Rather, it tends to project a sense of decorative stylization.

In Michael Lucero's figurations, the body and appendages are constructed of multicolored shards of brightly glazed earthenware. Decorative stylization takes on a different meaning from Schnabel's ceramic/figurative paintings of 1980, a meaning that is most traditionally tied to ceramic sculpture. Lucero is, in fact, a ceramist. His figurative concerns, however, are more pictorial and sculptural than they are related to the traditional context of the ceramic medium.[13]

There is a certain playfulness in Lucero's bent and twisted figures. At first glance, they might appear frivolous, as if designed from pipe cleaner permutations. Yet, Lucero's figures *are* expressive to the extent that they communicate a ritualized sense of Being, formally related to some African tribal sculpture. In wiring together his assortment of brightly glazed shards, often placing a pot in the place of the figure's head, Lucero has created expressionist works which suggest some degree of psychological insight.

Playfulness and refinement have replaced Schnabel's angst and complexity. Whereas Schnabel's plates and pots become the formal vehicle to convey emotional irony, Lucero's ceramic shards operate as structural readymades eliciting, if not pandering to, the viewer's sense of delight. Still, the reference to a primitive *homo luden* is communicated through Lucero's figurations as, for example, in his three untitled pieces from 1981, subtitled *Fish, Cucaraches,* and *Turtle.*

As in the late *gouaches découpées* by Matisse, an intuitive simplicity in Lucero's figurations truly abets their expressivity. In spite of their cerebral limitations, their formal restraint and decorative assertiveness manage to imply a genuine optimism. The humor, while not profound, is clearly insightful. What I find refreshing about Lucero's recent work is their vocabulary: the figurations are reduced to a childlike simplicity, reminiscent of foolish limericks or nonsense rhymes. Their substance is almost devoid of material; they have been built up from things taken down. They speak of metamorphosis, reconstruction, and faith in humankind. They do not obliterate consciousness; they fulfill it. They do not dehumanize; they make us laugh at ourselves. They stand within the realm of art as Wittgenstein's "form" stands in relation to "structure." They are about "language games" in the most naive way.[14]

The implications in the recent paintings of Julian Schnabel are overwhelming, making it difficult to focus upon the ground from which the ideas emerge. With Lucero, the focus is there, but the daring is thwarted by excessive indulgence in craft. The figurative variations are important to Lucero's formal vocabulary, but the process by which they are executed may become too predictable. His attention to historical prototypes from which his *homo fabers* and *homo ludens* emerge is a convincing attribute of the work.

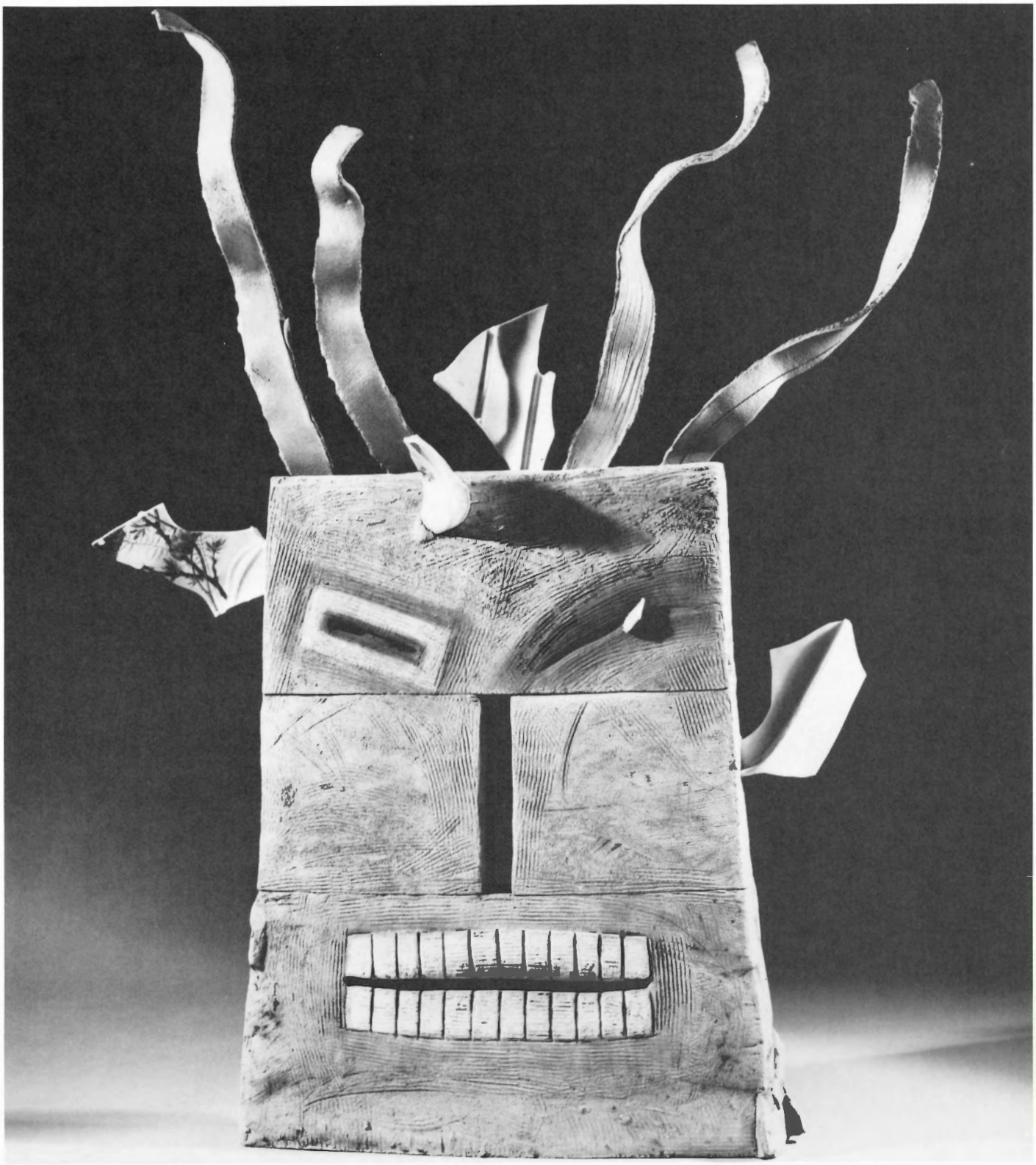
Both Schnabel and Lucero have a knack for recognizing and playing off the absurd. And while Lucero's representation is less awesome than Schnabel's, both shard-users are poetically seasoned in their manipulation of metaphor.

The expulsive liberty which Schnabel appears to be seeking in his recent large-scale works—some of which incorporate rather large-scale Mexican pottery—only reinforces the stronghold of the absurd as the underlying condition of his aesthetic.[15]

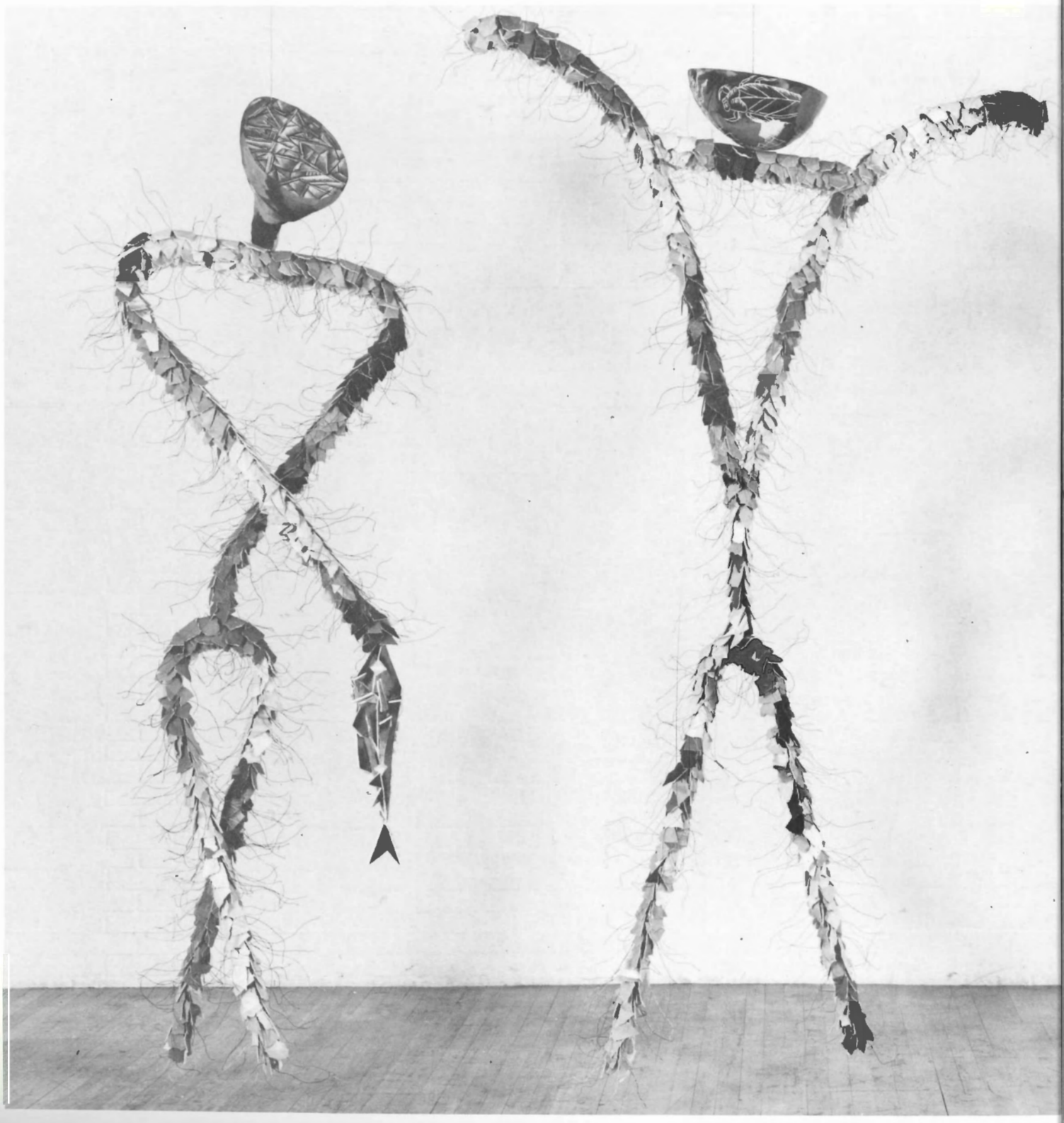
The crude and irrational juxtaposition of ceramic elements within these recent works is not unrelated to Frank Stella's *Indian Bird* series. Schnabel's primary hurdle, it would seem, is to avoid the purposely accidental look that ultimately gives way to forced manipulation. As it stands, Schnabel relies heavily upon eccentric subject matter and materials to assault our pictorial conventions. This, in itself, is not a problem. Rather, it is that the present chaos in his pictures echos a strong emotionalism that blocks any possibility of expression. In other words, Schnabel is still hedging, still finding his way out of the revolving door.

Shards used within the context of artmaking offer many possibilities for interpretation. Like any element within a formal composition, its meaning is construed largely by its placement within the whole. The overriding emphasis given to the destructive implications of shards in the works discussed here may represent the commodification of hysteria and violence, or they may serve as a basis from which a more positive statement may emerge. But shards within a work of art

Untitled *(1982) by Judy Moonelis, 50" (125 cm) high. Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia. Photo: Doug Long.*



(Left to right) Untitled (Fish) *(1981), 94″ (235 cm) high;* Untitled (Cucarachas) *(1981), 102″ (255 cm) high;* Untitled (Turtle) *(1981), 92″ (230 cm) high; all by Michael Lucero. Courtesy Charles Cowles Gallery, New York. Photo: David Lubarsky.*



are never neutral. In the works by the four contemporary artists discussed here, the value of ceramic and glass shards as sign is clearly great enough to transform meaning. When successful, this transformation may instill subjective meaning within the historical process—from the urge for self-destruction to that of a more archetypal reconstruction.

The problems in making this transformation function artistically has something to do with the realization that no impulse—whether destructive or constructive—is bigger than life itself. In other words, the power of life is ultimately greater than art. The power of observation is greater than our analysis or interpretation of that observation. The shock upon seeing a broken plate occurs because of preconceived ideas about the values attached to such intimate things. To detach observation from these sentiments is at times difficult, but often necessary. Even so, such detachment is never absolute, and rarely guarantees quality to be a condition of the work under observation. More than detached observation is the faith that may have accompanied the piercing of a Mimbres bowl—the faith that sets the spirit of the beholder free, and thus restores a more meaningful and intrinsic sense of being within the material world.

1. Stephen Wedgley, *Star-Hung Tits* (unpublished manuscript).
2. J. J. Brody, *Mimbres Painted Pottery,* (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1977), pp. 1–36.
3. Ibid., pp. 211–228.
4. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Origin of Philosophy,* trans. Tony Talbot (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), pp. 26–27.
5. Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and Her Bachelors* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), pp. 1–44.
6. Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York, "Carolee Schneemann: Early Work 1960/1970" (September 11–October 2, 1982).
7. Statement by Judy Moonelis, dated July 1982.
8. George Woodman, "Ceramic Decoration and the Concept of Ceramics as a Decorative Art," *American Ceramics* 1/1 (Winter 1982), pp. 30–34.
9. Carter Ratcliff, "Art to Art" (Interview with Julian Schnabel) *Interview Magazine* (October 1980), retyped version from Mary Boone Gallery, p. 3.
10. "Julian Schnabel," *Art-Rite (Painting)* 9 (Spring 1975), p. 18.
11. Ratcliff, *Interview,* reprint, p. 30.
12. Ibid.
13. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, *Clay,* Jacquelyn Rice, guest curator (March 27–May 3, 1981); catalogue, pp. 14–15.
14. These terms all have specific references to the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein. See Julius Hartnack, *Wittgenstein and Modern Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965). Lucero's manipulation of shards seems to illustrate many of the language principles discussed by the philosopher, particularly in the *Philosophical Investigations.* This relationship, however, is purely happenstantial; nevertheless, interesting.
15. The first major showing of these works was presented at the Mary Boone Gallery, New York (October 1982); the first example that I observed was shown a month earlier at the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

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The Bauer Pottery

Joanne Burstein

In 1885, when John Bauer founded his pottery in Paducah, Kentucky, the term "Industrial Revolution" was just being popularized by Arnold Toynbee.[1] The history of Bauer Pottery spans two centuries and two technological eras. As a family business modeled on the centuries-old European cottage industry, it was intended to meet the most basic needs and desires of the local community (flowerpots were a mainstay of production until the pottery closed in 1962).[2] As a factory, it was subject to the functional and stylistic demands of the marketplace, challenged by its competition, and required by economic necessity to utilize new technology.

In 1909, when reasons of health forced John Bauer to move his cottage pottery to Los Angeles, he faced regional competition from other ceramic factories for the first time. He was also met by a larger, more varied, and rapidly growing population as his marketplace. This change of venue inadvertently brought Bauer into the twentieth century, with new criteria for economic survival. Although the company continued to bring new workers and their families from Kentucky, training them on the job in the old manner, specialized talent was also available to his business for the first time. Responding to the local demand for ceramic tile and jardinieres for Mission-style houses, Bauer developed an artware line and hired designer Louis Ipsen and potter Matt Carlton.

Bauer Pottery is known to us largely because of the popularity of its inexpensive, colorful dinnerware produced during the 1930s and forties. As with other pieces of the period's kitsch—Depression Glass, Buck Rogers comics, and the Marx Brothers—a piece of Bauerware is inevitably colored by our nostalgia for childhood. And memories of that earlier time are certain to include the household objects—clothes, furniture, dishes, toys—that constituted our childhood environment. While salvaging such domestic relics is certainly one way we document our memories, it is also a way to preserve our cultural history.

The history and aesthetic of a cultural artifact are synergistic; numerous are the influences created and absorbed by it. A piece of Bauer pottery is an artifact from a particular slice of our cultural history. Prominent in that history is the rapid development of a parallel culture—our technology—and crucial to its development was the assembly line. Henry Ford's success in combining men and machinery to produce the automobile created a new consumer class.[3] In point of fact, the principles of the assembly line had grown out of the old cottage-industry methods of assigning workers specialized tasks in the production process.[4]

Bauer's manual assembly line techniques (used in flowerpot and tile production) were combined during the thirties and

Bean Pot *(1920s), 5" (12.5 cm) high. Photo: Bruce Handelsman.*

Aladdin Lamp *teapot (1940s), 5½" (14 cm) high. Photo: Roger Gass.*

forties with the talents of its artware designers and craftsmen to create inexpensive dinnerware. This dinnerware, suitable for production from plaster molds and glazed in a uniform manner with a restricted number of glazes, allowed Bauer Pottery to successfully make the shift in market strategy from the uniquely crafted sensibility of the early years of this century to the mass-produced uniformity of the postwar period. Largely the result of luck and good timing, it wasn't until 1962 that this anachronistic production method failed.

The new technology brought massive changes in the American lifestyle. Roads were being laid across the country to accommodate the automobile, and by 1920, one-half of rural and urban America had electricity. Just ten years later, an astounding four-fifths of the country had entered the new age.[5] Supported by the nation's enthusiasm for these technological changes, the aesthetic of America was also changing. Perfume bottles, ships, trains, factories all were redesigned in line with the tenets of Louis Sullivan, Le Corbusier, and Frank Lloyd Wright[6] and with the practices of the Dessau Bauhaus, which tried to address directly the exigencies of mass production.[7] In its bid to woo the new breed of American consumer with "modern" styling, however, the geographically isolated and unsophisticated Bauer Pottery was probably more influenced by everyday consumer products, such as the Automatic Electric telephone (1928) and the first stylized, colorfully painted Model A Ford (1927).[8]

Thus in 1930, when Louis Ipsen's Plain Tableware hit the market in a wide selection of colors, Bauer capitalized on the grassroots success of a shift in taste that was changing the look of the country. The referentially Bauhaus look of much of Bauer's dinnerware was, in effect, second-generation Bauhaus. The aesthetic theory of the twenties had become the reality of the thirties and forties. Bauerware met all the Bauhaus criteria: it combined hands-on design in direct interaction with the factory, it was functional and practical to use, and it added a definite aesthetic presence to the environment.[9]

The success of Bauerware design was ultimately determined by the silent vote of the dollar. Bauer Pottery and its competitors were still very much a cottage industry. Unlike most large factories, Bauer was accessible to its customers and complaints were made directly. What the public did not respond to was quickly dropped from its line; likewise, once a design succeeded in the marketplace, the conservative nature of the business resisted all but the most superficial changes. The items offered expressed what the pottery's designers thought would appeal to the popular mood for the modern and the streamlined. Their success proves them right. In retrospect, Bauerware did include some surprisingly sophisticated expressions of good design.

It seems safe to assume that the original Plain and Ring dinnerware designs—and the subsequent Monterey, Hi-Fire/Sears, El Chico, and Gloss Pastel kitchenware—were the direct result of observing the Ring pattern being thrown on the potter's wheel. Indeed, some of the early Plain Tableware was actually hand-thrown by Matt Carlton. By the following year the Ring line had been "modernized," but it was still based on the look of hand-thrown pottery. The popularity of this look was so widespread—similar lines were carried by Pacific Clay Products, Metlox, and Catalina Island Pottery[10]—that it would be difficult, even meaningless, to document the originator of the design. All of these potteries aimed to meet the popular demand for low-cost, colorful, casual dinnerware. Their competitive maneuvers were largely confined to minor design changes, unique accessories, and color choices. Many of the sets were essentially interchangeable.

Bauerware, in particular, was heavy and had rounded edges and curving lines; its "heaviness" connoted solidity. Its lines were the smooth curves necessitated by plaster mold production, resulting in ware that was informal, comfortable to hold, and easy to clean. The classic piece of Bauerware is the *Aladdin Teapot,* designed

about 1939 to be compatible with the previous decade of Plain and Ring dinnerware. Popular throughout the forties, its staggered, banded body gave it a graceful transition from base to lid, as well as maximum volume. It was visually fanciful, physically stable, and quite practical.

For two decades, these Southern California potteries met the needs of a rising middle class—less formal, more culturally isolated, more oriented to outdoor-living than their counterparts in the rest of the country. It is here, in Southern California in the late forties, that the geographical split in the aesthetic of American ceramics occurs. Clay artists Peter Voulkos, John Mason, et al, reacted against this ceramic "tradition" of low-fired, cheap, colorful pottery (which in itself had been a successful blow against tradition). Bauer kitsch was seen by these artists as symptomatic of all that was "bad" in ceramics. A few years later, when Ken Price and Ron Nagle appeared on the Southern California scene, they went right toward Bauerware's smooth, brilliantly colored, handheld "look." By contrast, the East and Midwest had real and ersatz antiques to contend with; in response, its potters took up the Alfred aesthetic of earthy functionalism, drawn by the honest qualities of rugged stoneware and the folk pottery firing methods of those regions.

Even in a culture of change such as ours, which discards traditions as quickly as it invents them, the security of tradition remains appealing. Indeed, the growing trend to collect and preserve the ubiquitous, mass-produced goods of our consumer culture is based in the repeated influx and subsequent dispersal of these disposable artifacts. The need to recover and covet them will probably intensify so long as this throwaway climate exists. As surely as the Mannerists opposed the High Renaissance and the English Romantics opposed the Dutch realists, Americans today are resisting this culture of obsolescence. One such expression of this is the grassroots rescue of Bauerware from oblivion. But it is also expressed by the ever-growing acceptance and collecting of art and unique craft, both contemporary and traditional.

Bauerware was a product of that disposable consumer culture, but it was also a naive expression of the most serious philosophical experiments in Modern design. For its time, these commercially justified objects may have had more influence on our ceramic history than the Dessau Bauhaus or all of the profundities of Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright. Bauerware is a cultural artifact, a fact of life, a symbol of Southern California culture in the forties—not unlike the Golden Arches or the Jordache jeans of today.

1. John G. Burke and Marshall C. Eakin, *Technology and Change* (San Francisco: Boyd & Fraser Publishing Co., 1979), p. 47.
2. Jack Chipman and Judy Stangler, *Bauer Pottery: The Complete Collectors Guide* (Culver City: California Spectrum, 1982), p. 122.
3. Burke and Eakin, *Technology and Change,* p. 283.
4. Burke and Eakin, *Technology and Change,* p. 286.
5. Burke and Eakin, *Technology and Change,* p. 277.
6. Donald J. Bush, *The Streamlined Decade* (New York: George Braziller, 1975), p. 135.
7. Herbert Bayer et al (ed.), *Bauhaus* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1938), p. 125.
8. Bush, *The Streamlined Decade,* p. 125.
9. Bayer, *Bauhaus,* p. 133.
10. Rochelle Reed, "California Sun Settings," *New West Magazine* 3 (August 14, 1978), p. 68.

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Ring Ware: Beer Pitcher and Mugs
(1930–1940s), pitcher 9" (22.5 cm) high.
Photo: Roger Gass.

Pink Swan *(1940s), 10" (25 cm) long. Photo:*
Bruce Handelsman.

Exhibitions

Yellowstone *(1982), 21" (52.5 cm) high. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Jonathan Barber.*

Golden Glow *(1981), 21½" (54 cm) high. Courtesy Meyer Breier Weiss, San Francisco. Photo: Jonathan Barber.*

Jane Ford Aebersold

Joanne Burstein

It is helpful to see a new artistic style in terms of both continuity and discontinuity with other styles, not simply, as some would have it, in terms either of tradition or revolt. New art exists within history, because it both continues the past and breaks with it: also because it is made within a contemporary context and by individuals who themselves exist within history.[1]
John Perreault

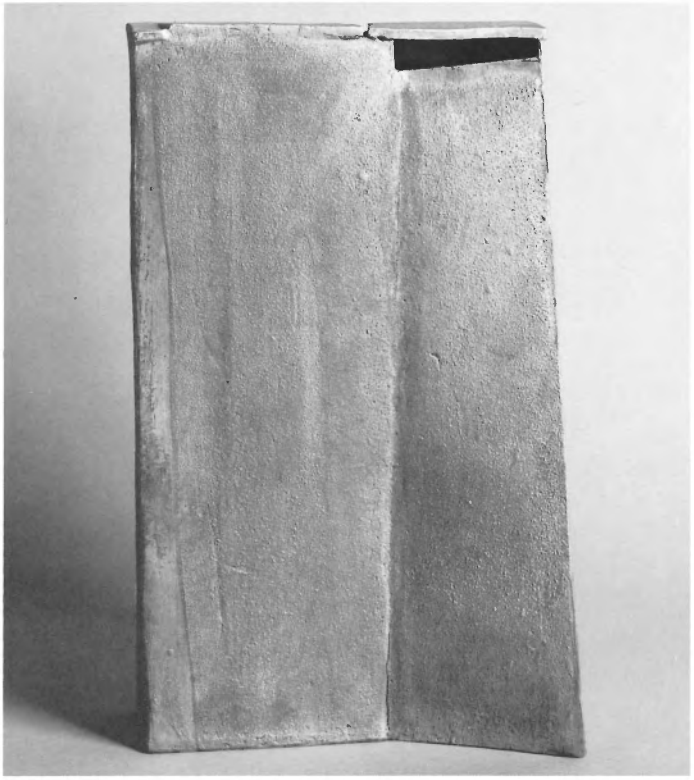
Jane Ford Aebersold confounds us with the layered references in her work, the variety of forms, the incongruity of color. Its consideration requires a journey into individual process to unveil the connections and organization of the whole. In art circles, commentators have tried identifying such pluralism by naming it Post-Modernism. In ceramics, we may have to call it History-Conscious Individualism, since clay's modernist break occurred as Modernism lay dying in the other arts.

Born in Texas, trained at Alfred University, and now living and teaching in Bennington, Vermont, Aebersold, like many artists in this country, belongs to no specific place. Historically, ceramic work has been marked by a sense of place—local clays, local forms, local firing techniques. In Aebersold's thrown pots, we see Robert Turner's casually graceful form connected, spiritually, to Japanese Iga ware. In *Real Honey* and *Honey Too,* we have two pots, intimate in scale, freely thrown, yet showing careful attention to proportion and line. They have a strong sculptural presence that supercedes their functional vocabulary. The swirls of iridescent luster glazing add a celestial lyricism to the straightforwardness of these earthy forms.

The slab sculptures, while technically vessels, show their allegiance to the rectilinear format of painting. Aebersold has acknowledged the influence of Rothko and Frankenthaler on the development of her glaze color. Yet these sculptures are architectonic enclosed spaces, broken by small, subtly irregular, rectangular openings—reminiscent of the adobe structures of the Southwest. The dramatic shifts of color across the forms and around their corners go beyond the lush, atmospheric coloration of Abstract Expressionist painting, as golden lavender dissolves into silver turquoise at no discernable point. At their most successful, they remind one of the dazzling, negative retinal images of sunlight on white walls.

It is the use of gold, copper, and platinum luster that most immediately distinguishes Aebersold's work. This fusing of the look of Art Nouveau glass to stoneware clay clearly states the extremes of sensibility she seeks to synthesize. In *Quivera* and *Golden Glow,* Aebersold balances the romantic baroqueness of such colors against the strong simplicity of the thrown pots and slab pieces—much as Ron Nagle does. The most recent works, however, betray an uncomfortable transition to newer forms.

In *Cody* and the *Concho* pieces, Aebersold combines curved slabs, surface sgraffito, and small, low-relief additions to the rectilinear forms. She is apparently seeking a new synthesis of complex form and glaze. This is an ambitious direction because the slab surface is not only a painting, but a low-relief sculpture—demanding that the sculptural interactions be solved on two levels. Here, the architectonic strength of the sculptural form must balance the expressionistic surface of both the glaze "painting" and its texture. By refusing to choose between complexity of form and color, Aebersold introduces a new dimension to the work that seems, as yet, unresolved.



1. John Perreault, "Issues in Pattern Painting," *ARTFORUM,* November 1977.

The work reviewed here was seen at Meyer Breier Weiss, San Francisco (October 5–November 6, 1982).

Joanne Burstein is a freelance writer living in the Bay Area, who frequently writes for Artweek *and* American Ceramics.

Elaine Carhartt

Mac McCloud

Elaine Carhartt has invented a singular world of her own. It is populated by an unusual group of personages, too large to be elves, too small to be human. After considerable reflection, I decided they were most like trolls.

The world they inhabit, other than the Asher/Faure Gallery in Los Angeles, has a strong medieval quality. Garments are snug and picturesque; the expressive, peering faces are hugged tightly by hoods or esoteric and elaborate headgear, much of it amusing. We soon notice that their shoes do not match. Nothing seems to be alike.

Although these are bisqued clay figures, the artist's point of view is that clay is simply a cheap, strong, and available material with which to construct the figures. This approach to clay can be both traditional and legitimate, for clay is that marvelous chameleon of materials that has always been used in thousands of different fashions.

Carhartt paints the smooth surfaces of her robust figures with a variety of acrylic hues, matching colors to the lively costumes and peculiar, baroque headpieces. The figures can easily be construed as oversized dolls or giant Japanese puppets. Often enough, some sort of drama or action is about to take place. The figures gesture toward an audience, prepare to move, or are in action. In the Asher/Faure exhibit, two of them sat on a prepared floor staring intently into each other's eyes. Although in most instances the figures remain isolated from one another, the intense interaction here was startling.

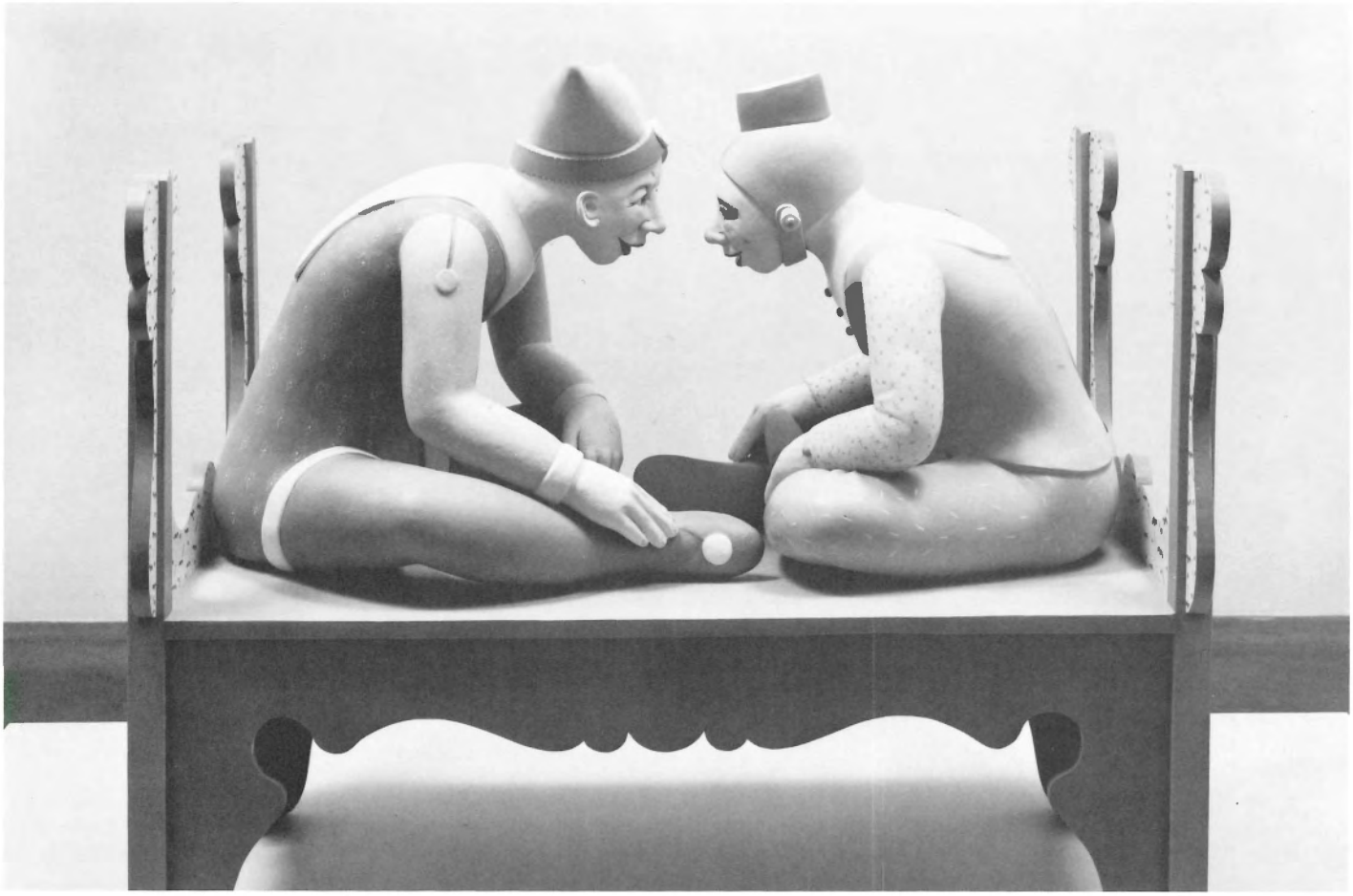
What can be relished in the work of Elaine Carhartt is the radiant, antique insularity of the figures, their ebullient, performing presences which, at a size close to human, slyly impinge upon us. They prod the spectator, nicely, like a small hand plucking at an elbow, insisting on attention, making us slightly uneasy, perhaps, but perforce, responsive. This strange world catches our attention, arouses our curiosity, entertains us as it reveals that world's insular characteristics. While we are invited to imagine what it is like, we remain, in an odd way, excluded. We are induced to unravel the mystery before us.

It is if we were at a play and there was no action. Carhartt intrigues us with the task of exploring or imagining just what is happening. Initially, the context of the work remains secret. This may be part of the reason why Carhartt's work has captured such respectful attention, as if someone had slipped open a slit in a tent and whispered, "Hey, come on in, it's wild in here." Everything inside is cool and immaculate, free, robust, intent, and pleasant.

It is rewarding to get lost in these sophisticated patterns and tasteful inventions which serve as sculptural shape and variation. Many of the characters have a bouncy, incipiently acrobatic air

Installation view of "Elaine Carhartt: New Works" at Asher/Faure, Los Angeles.

Lovers *(1982), 38" (95 cm) high. Courtesy Asher/Faure, Los Angeles.*



about them. They are muscular, concentrating totally on their allotted task, playing chess "a la Carhartt," pondering something, or playing an instrument.

The artist's polished technique is simplicity itself, lending the figures a sophisticated elegance that helps to amplify their foreign origin. There appears to be no gloom in that cheerful, active world; only beaming burghers disporting themselves with offspring or playing games. The two staring men, locked in an eternal stare under their Star Wars headgear, look like they may go on doing that for years.

They are performers. We can recall that Carhartt's previous statements included a circus parade, jongleurs, and ornate harlequins. Although the work presented at Asher/Faure is of single figures or unrelated double figure situations, the thread of entertainment is carried throughout. The ancient visual and literary pun of the creative person as entertainer is quietly and subtly made.

The figures fairly glow with an intelligent and polished refinement, a droll and finished wit and an almost.childlike innocence that suggests a dream existence far from this world of cars and violence and money. They celebrate pleasure, involvement, and entertainment. Not a frown in a carload.

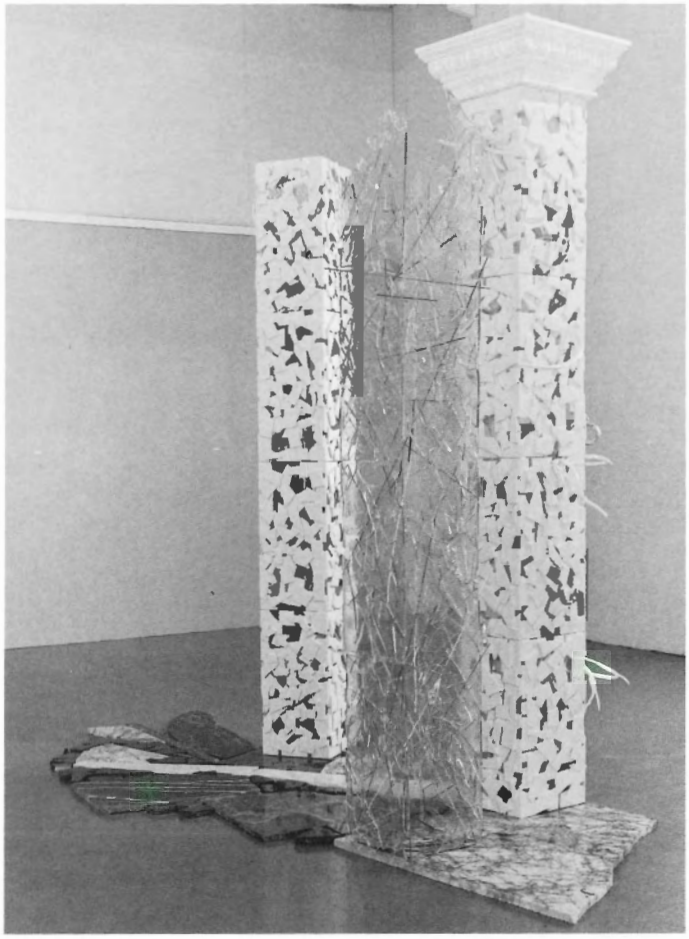
Elaine Carhartt's work has been well received on the West Coast, attracting critical and collector attention. Her new pieces indicate that her ideas are evolving at due speed and that the artist may be inching closer to a crossroads in her development. The future generations may turn out to be interesting, indeed.

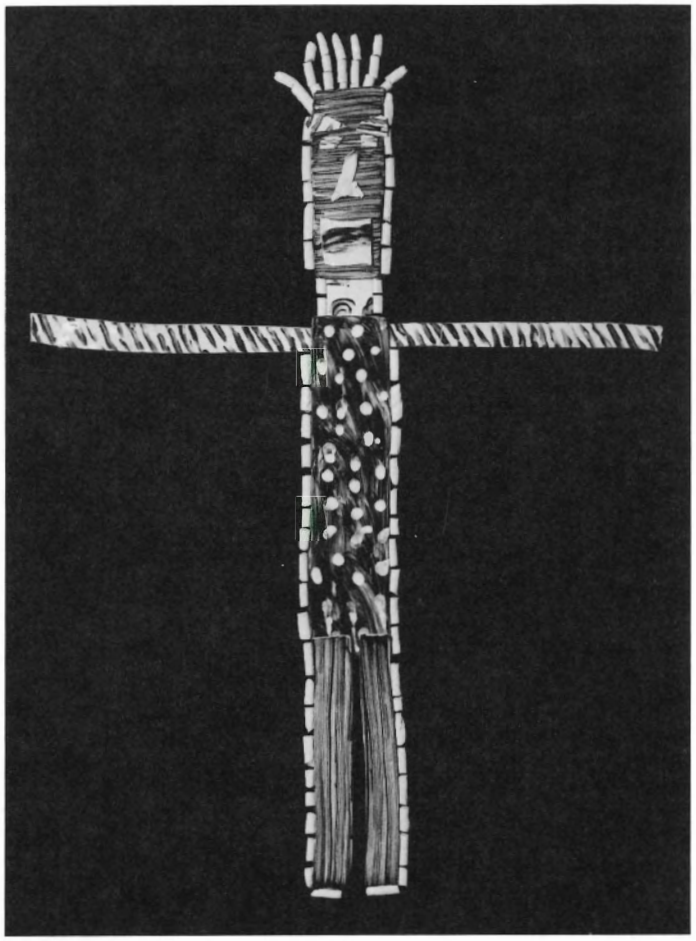
This work was exhibited at Asher/Faure Gallery, Los Angeles (June 26–July 24, 1982).

Mac McCloud is the pen name of Malcolm McClain, artist, teacher, and critic, living in Los Angeles.

Three Columns *(1982), 9' (2.7 m) high, fused clay and glass on marble. Courtesy Rubin/Mardin. Seattle. Photo: Jonathan Ezekiel.*

Figure No. 1 *(1981), 84" x 61" (210 x 152.5 cm), ceramic. Courtesy Rubin/Mardin, Seattle. Photo: Russell Johnson.*





Ann Gardner

Ron Glowen

"Figuration . . . in the back of my mind . . . somehow I want to incorporate dimension, to come *off* the wall."

That refrain, voiced by Seattle artist Ann Gardner, expresses a feeling or desire that has driven many a painter to incorporate relief objects in the work (Julian Schnabel comes to mind, as do Jasper Johns and Marcel Duchamp, though I presume their rationale was expressed with greater articulation and bombast), or to take up a new plastic medium with broader dimensional possibilities. But Ann Gardner is not a painter; rather, she has always been a ceramist, first studying at the University of Oregon and then working in Seattle since 1977. She is a mosaicist turned relief sculptor. It's convenient to forget that architectural ceramics has always been at or on the wall, given the mutability of clay to model forms in space or the current debate about the importance of the ceramic vessel as sculptural form.

But "coming off the wall" into figuration is something more than a desire for physical dimension in one's work. Her porcelain slab figures and masks are gestalt forms rather than figures, at least as figuration is practiced today by ceramic artists like Patti Warashina and Viola Frey. Rendering the human form as an icon is a subconscious urge as old as the Venus of Willendorf.

Gardner's figures convey that urge, yet they also convey the topical issues of decoration, fashion, and New Image figuration. Gardner's work is both austere and jazzy, profound and childlike. White porcelain slabs are fingerpainted with black slip and are sometimes scored with fingertip pressure. A clear, high-gloss glaze is then applied, and the slabs are low-fired while still wet. The slight irregularity of hand-cut edges is further emphasized by the curling, warping, cracking, and breaking of the slabs as they are fired. Gardner relies on these chance degradations to discover forms such as a facial profile, or takes matters into her own hands once again by breaking the fired slabs and making assemblages from the shards. As she says, "I might as well break it up and do something interesting."

Gardner's latest works, a group of relief masks and large cross-figures, are boldly adorned with black-and-white pattern motifs of circle, line, and squiggle. Features such as hair and eyes are collaged onto the slabs. Colored ornamentation is often applied in different mediums; bits and shards of mirror, brightly glazed tile, and painted glass embellish the halo, face, and fingers of *Blue Face.* The figurative work assumes a wildly hieratic or totemic stance—they are effigies, but contemporary ones, exorcising not one's fear of the universal unknown but rather more modern anxieties like choosing the right garb to wear or how appearances presume a choice of lifestyle. *Green Neck* is punk fashion, but more disturbing than the "real thing."

Mosaic is still an important application for Gardner. Even her masks and profiles are rendered as surfaces to be texturally adorned with bits of decoration. Shards of porcelain, colored commercial tile, mirror, and glass have been epoxied and grouted into tabletops, freestanding columns, figures with cement cores, and commissioned works such as a mosaic mural for a park in Seattle and several kitchen and bathroom surfaces (Gardner's own shower stall is a stupendously extravagant collage of color, shape, and sheen). The decorative and functional connotations of mosaic are still intact, as is methodology; Gardner's approach is to break down (literally and metaphorically) the cultural expectations of useful mosaic surfaces and re-order them in playful, coarse, and "nonhygienic" configurations.

It is the emblematic and iconic use of figuration, however, that informs Ann Gardner's best work. The mask, a symbolic representation of human psychic transformation, can still express the ways in which those transformations occur today. The cutting edge of Gardner's figures is their ability to delve into consciousness without being cast as a certain persona or type. They are magical; what's more, they are meaningful.

Ann Gardner's ceramic and glass sculptures were viewed at Rubin/Mardin, Seattle.

Ron Glowen is a contributing editor to Artweek *and has written for* Vanguard, Art in America, Images & Issues, *and other journals.*

Nicholas Homoky

Susan Montgomery

Nicholas Homoky's porcelain vessels rely on a symbiotic relationship between volumetric form and line drawing. Within a reduced repertoire of small, creamy white, porcelain geometric forms, inlaid with fine black lines, Homoky applies the principles of drawing to the third dimension. Just as an artist uses lines to define and enhance form on paper, Homoky "draws" his vessels in space. Crisp, precise, thinly potted shapes are defined by linear edges, profiles, and silhouettes. Sharp undercuts create shadow lines. Inlaid black lines often delineate rims, bases, handles, and transition points, or compartmentalize surfaces into orderly, two-dimensional units. The strict black and white palette and minimal texture of the matt porcelain enhance this effect of drawing on paper.

Just as illusionistic space can be suggested on paper, Homoky also uses line to create ambiguous spatial relationships. A small, triangular teapot (too small to function), offers three creamy surfaces for drawing. Homoky draws teapots and cups, perhaps as a visual record of the conception process, studies for the vessel applied to its completed state. In any case, the vessel serves, in this instance, as a surface to draw on, rather than a volume to be clarified. The drawing is purposely shifted out of register with the form. Flattened, Matisse-like drawings of a teapot and cup defy the physical plane, sliding around corners without restriction. There is the somewhat unsettling sensation of seeing the teapot from two perspectives simultaneously, a kind of double exposure. The drawn handles and spouts are not reconciled to their three-dimensional counterparts. Indeed, the handle and spout are not even logically located on the "real" teapot. This constant slipping of reality and illusion is carried to its obvious conclusion by the total nonfunction of many of the so-called vessels. Crumpled spouts, misplaced and impossibly small handles, lidless teapots, and spherical bowls that have no resting place all self-consciously deny the function they so insistently recall.

Contradictions are more subtly suggested by the relationship between vessel interiors and exteriors, between solids and voids. Homoky's placement of lines on the outside of the vessel is frequently contradicted by the interior lines. Lines shift ever so slightly, up or down, creating tension and movement as the eye tries to justify inside and out. Where a line is assumed to be a solid black strip through the vessel wall, there are actually two parallel lines at different heights. Similarly, hollow handles are variously connected to the vessels. Sometimes a black circle outlines the circumference of the handle. Sometimes a solid black disk only suggests the hollowness of the handle; other times there is actually a hole. For all its straightforward clarity at first glance, there is an unpredictable, subtle strategy at work.

These ambiguities enliven the vessels, providing a humorous, quiet vitality that would be lost in a more boisterous style or brilliant palette. Homoky's black and white seem perfectly suited to the process of drawing in space and; like fine drawing on paper, encourages an assumption of objectivity and clarity, which the artist can manipulate to his own advantage.

Nicholas Homoky's porcelain works were exhibited in 1982 at Westminster Gallery, Boston.

Susan Montgomery is a freelance writer living in Beverly, Massachusetts.

Untitled *(1981), porcelain. Courtesy Westminster Gallery, Boston.*

Coille McLaughlin Hooven

Joanne Burstein

The duality of figurative imagery and functional form has been part of Coille Hooven's ceramic vocabularly since the early sixties. Her porcelain dinnerware has the casual and fluid grace of wheelthrown form; yet she has consistently integrated fantasy creatures in whimsical juxtapositions that add a layer of amusing, sometimes perplexing content to these functional wares. Her work has also paid personal and distinctive tribute to the long tradition of Chinese and then European blue and white ware, which has come to symbolize sophisticated elegance in dinnerware. This tribute, however, is visually contradicted by the impropriety of the gesturally vital thrown forms, which are off center, precariously based, and adorned by impossibly fragile handles and the anthropomorphic figures from some unrecorded fairy tale. This synthesis of functional fantasy reached a peak in the mermaid teapots of the late seventies.

In her recent show at Elizabeth Fortner Gallery, we see the work dividing into two parts: the functional ware shows an ever-developing throwing technique and decorative brushwork, but with a marked absence of figurative content; beside this stands a more sculptural body of work. In *Time For Tea,* for example, we are offered a ceramic vignette within an actual birdcage—a ducklike bird and a woman wearing an animal mask cling to the outside of the cage, while a homunculus family, mother, father, and child serenely enjoy tea inside as an ominous bird hangs over them on a perch (taking up most of the space in the cage). It is a strange and not wholly friendly work, in spite of the surface whimsy and humor. Threats of more explicit danger enter Hooven's vocabulary of charmed unreality in pieces like *Bottom Sucker,* in which a bandaged fish goes through physical transformations from duck to human to fish, and in *The Keeper of the Present,* depicting a matriarchal animal standing firmly, even belligerently, on a checkered tile floor with bandages on her eyes, indicating her vulnerability and "blindness."

There seems to be another duality emerging in the sculptural work itself. Pieces of the last year are dominated by pairs: *Woodchopper* and *Wife, Nobody Knows* and *The Carpenter, Adam's Shirt* and *Eve's Pillow, Foot Loose* and *Fancy Free.* These lead to some interesting revelations and, because the material is so unguarded—like a dream—one hesitates to interpret them. In several works, miniature knives, hammers, and hatchets threaten the static figures. The recurring vocabulary of male and female, threatened, damaged, and bound physically, and the use of anthropomorphic forms, indicates a very primal origin for the imagery.

In written description this sounds a little ominous; in fact, the figuration is so delicate and somehow humorous as to seem a

Woodchopper *and* Wife *(1982), 13" (32.5 cm), porcelain and silk. Photos: Charles Frizzell.*

harmless fairy tale. The appearance of pillows and shoes as imagery—as in *Foot Loose* (an animal man is rowing a porcelain shoe across a blue silk pillow) and in *Fancy Free* (his female counterpart stands waiting in a Cinderella slipper with an elephant leg for a heel)—indicates there is at least one explicit fairy tale here. In *Woodchopper* and *Wife,* the allusion is to traditional handmade dolls with their porcelain heads, hands, feet, and bodies of silk cloth. The male figure's head rises from a leafy collar, but this head is crowned by a tree stump with a hatchet stuck in it. The female's bandaged head has a *cakra* energy spiral with a hole drilled through it. The individual elements combine symbolic ideas of life force and threat, just as their metaphorical references to physical harm are mitigated by their miniature scale and delicate, graceful forms.

In *Kingdom of the Monkey,* which refers to the story of the hundredth monkey—where the consciousness of an entire segment of the population is raised after a certain percentage of individual monkeys have absorbed the new level of learning—there may be a conscious effort to speak to our universal condition. As with *The Keeper of the Present,* this work indicates the artist's desire to deal with larger human issues through a personal vocabulary of symbols—primarily the fundamental issues of male-femaleness.

Although it is not as common in clay work as it is in painting and assemblage (viz. Joseph Cornell) here we have an example of the expression of personal unconscious imagery, which has developed parallel to and is only now wholly breaking away from the functional structure of ceramics. This may mean, as is always the case with the highly personal, that there will be a limited audience for this work. However, like the fairy tale, Hooven's work provides an immediate narrative, intimacy of scale, complex imagery, and layers of meaning open to interpretation at the viewer's discretion. Whether in the context of a functional piece or a wholly sculptural one, the viewer is presented with a small mystery to unravel—a mystery coupled with humor that makes each encounter with the object full of wonder at the juxtapositions of imagery and respect for the artist's skill with her medium.

The "Complete World of Coille Hooven" was on exhibit at Elizabeth Fortner Gallery, Santa Barbara, California (May 26–June 27, 1982).

Vase *(1982), 10" (25 cm) high, earthenware.*
Photo: Peter Lee.

Gail Kendall

Janet Koplos

Gail Kendall's latest work continues to express her interest in color and form through forceful surface. Gone are the pastel tints of her earlier work, exaggeratedly attenuated cups and teapots with mushroomlike surfaces, but a character of fantasy and whimsy remain, coupled with a new aggressive edge.

The new work relates to the pattern painting of Cynthia Carlson as much as anything. That's evident in the toothpasty extrusions which embellish the surface, in the focus on decoration, and in the garish color combinations. Because Carlson and Betty Woodman have collaborated, one might seek similarities in the pottery of Woodman and Kendall. It's a tenuous connection. While Woodman's patterns flicker in one's vision and sometimes nearly dissolve the form, Kendall's patterns push outward, emphasizing form with a radiating, swelling directional force. While Woodman's objects have the lines of pulled taffy, Kendall's are more stiffly resistant, all shoulders and elbows. However, the two women share an interest in utility, which influences the form of their work, despite the primacy of other concerns.

Kendall's forms are muscular and forthright, neither ambiguous nor over-refined. The pieces that adopt the Chinese ginger jar standard are all compressed to a degree, or are at least lopped off at the top in such a way that the growth of the form is thwarted vertically, so they flex their shoulders. This emphatic termination is marked by a thick, juicy black lip.

A teapot and a tall basket with handle display the same forceful and abrupt concepts of form. In the teapot, a square-profile handle rises to three humps, a configuration roughly repeated by the carved top of the pot and by the framed decorative panel on the side. Both teapot and basket have a raw quality that is expressed in asymmetric, angular framing, and striations on the sides of these two frontal forms.

One has the feeling that these objects are formed rapidly and nonchalantly, particularly the crusty extrusions that litter the surface in line or loop. But that impression is subverted by the overall complexity, and even a kind of regularity, in the surface decoration.

Kendall confesses to a love for textiles, glitter, sequins, flash—a sort of Bette Midler aesthetic. That's apparent in her dotted surfaces that might be characterized as having reverse sequins: for instance, a vivid but matt blue peeks through a glossy, almost syrupy black glaze. On top of that she plies her cake-decorator circles, dabs, lines, in colors that, ranging from cool gray to the hottest red orange, always incorporate strong contrasts in value, hue, or intensity.

Kendall plays with multilayered surfaces. For example, a blue vase with "sequins" of shiny red is embellished with incised cloud shapes in pale yellow, each supporting a rectangular strip of dark green that, in turn, is topped by a loose lavender squiggle, seemingly a squeeze from the tube. The exuberance and vividness of these works hearken back to Pop Art, and in this particular piece I see fleeting suggestions that these decorations are either comicstrip representations of dreams or dialogue "balloons." The applied strip and squiggle, bright and dimensional, might be seen as a quotation. More often, though, no outside reference is implied. Kendall's interest is pattern, not message.

These pots have a gutsy character, particularly pronounced when one considers that Kendall takes her stand in Minnesota, where Bernard Leach's influence is greatest. She follows an independent course, one defined by its opposition to the prevailing aesthetic of much work that surrounds her.

These works seem to mark a new and more assured position for Kendall. Their blatancy, brightness, energy, and outwardness seem to synthesize and extend several themes from her earlier work in an amusing, pleasurable way. Yet I'm left with a sense of restraint, a feeling that Kendall has not yet let herself go, that the surfaces of these objects want to explode and obliterate the forms, or at least give it an athletic try. These pots seem far from final. They're merely a next step, a way station on a road to something Kendall must define.

Gail Kendall: Earthenware Pottery was exhibited at By Design, Minneapolis (September 20–25, 1982).

Janet Koplos is a contributing editor to The New Art Examiner.

Jens Morrison

Ed Forde

Much of contemporary art is hung up on nostalgia and self-indulgence. This is especially true of Neoexpressionism and other intentionally excessive styles that sometimes digress into self-parody. Currently, American ceramics has avoided these trends in its customary role as follower of the painting and sculpture vanguard. Still recovering from dominant movements in pseudo-Japanese pottery and Pop Art assemblage, American claywork is beginning to feel the effects of this neo-traditionalism.

During the past seven years, Jens Morrison has developed a body of sculptural ceramic forms based on architecture, humor, and mythology. This *Farmounian* series has evolved from a collection of derivative visual puns to a refined statement on form and color with humor and lightheartedness. Through the natural progression of his work, Morrison has loosened up his images, abstracted some of his compulsive detailing, and produced a more effective, flowing imagery.

The new work sizzles with formal contradictions. Fairly rigid base structures are offset by various organic shapes growing out of the tops of the forms. These appendages counterbalance the central geometry and extend the work's volume into the surrounding physical space. They seem bigger than actual size and somewhat human or "growing," like hybrid cactus. Obscure shapes and edges in vivid, excessive color blend the disparate elements together. Various images emerge and recede within the color composition, while others appear to float in space like three-dimensional drawings. Morrison has achieved movement and illusion through his sophisticated manipulation of form and color.

Appearances can be deceiving, and the pervasiveness of Neo-expressionism threatens to capture Morrison's work within this categorization. Because they share common attitudes toward color and surface, and basic figurative references, Morrison's new pieces could be stylistically associated with current "naive" expressionism. But the evolution of this imagery is not based on a nostalgia for previous traditions (German Expressionism) or on a reaction to the intellectual reductivism of recent movements (Minimal Art and Conceptual Art). Jens Morrison considers himself a folk artist.

This work utilizes common universal objects as the references for his imagery. We recognize enough of the stylized details to identify houses, cactus, cups, and other ordinary elements. The unorthodox combinations of these objects, the distortion of forms, and the unpredictable balances and tensions in these pieces convey a cartoonlike surrealism. These twisting, asymmetrical sculptures are as animated as a funny personality or a popular song. They function more as storytelling or entertainment dressed in the formal guise of sophisticated artmaking. This lightheartedness and accessibility imbue the work with a folk art character.

Humor in art can be dangerous territory for the serious visual artist. It can be so potent and distracting as to overwhelm the other aesthetic and conceptual values of an artwork. The borderline between expressive and "cute" is tenuous, and occasionally Morrison is too indulgent in this area. The intimate scale and glossy attractiveness of ceramics make it especially vulnerable to human empathies of preciousness and beauty. Morrison's rich coloration and humorous allusions overpower many of the formal subtleties in his work. Modern Expressionism has been most successful in conveying qualities of mysticism and spiritualism through gesture and color. Morrison needs to temper his effective style with these more enduring qualities of content—the metaphysical properties of true expressionism.

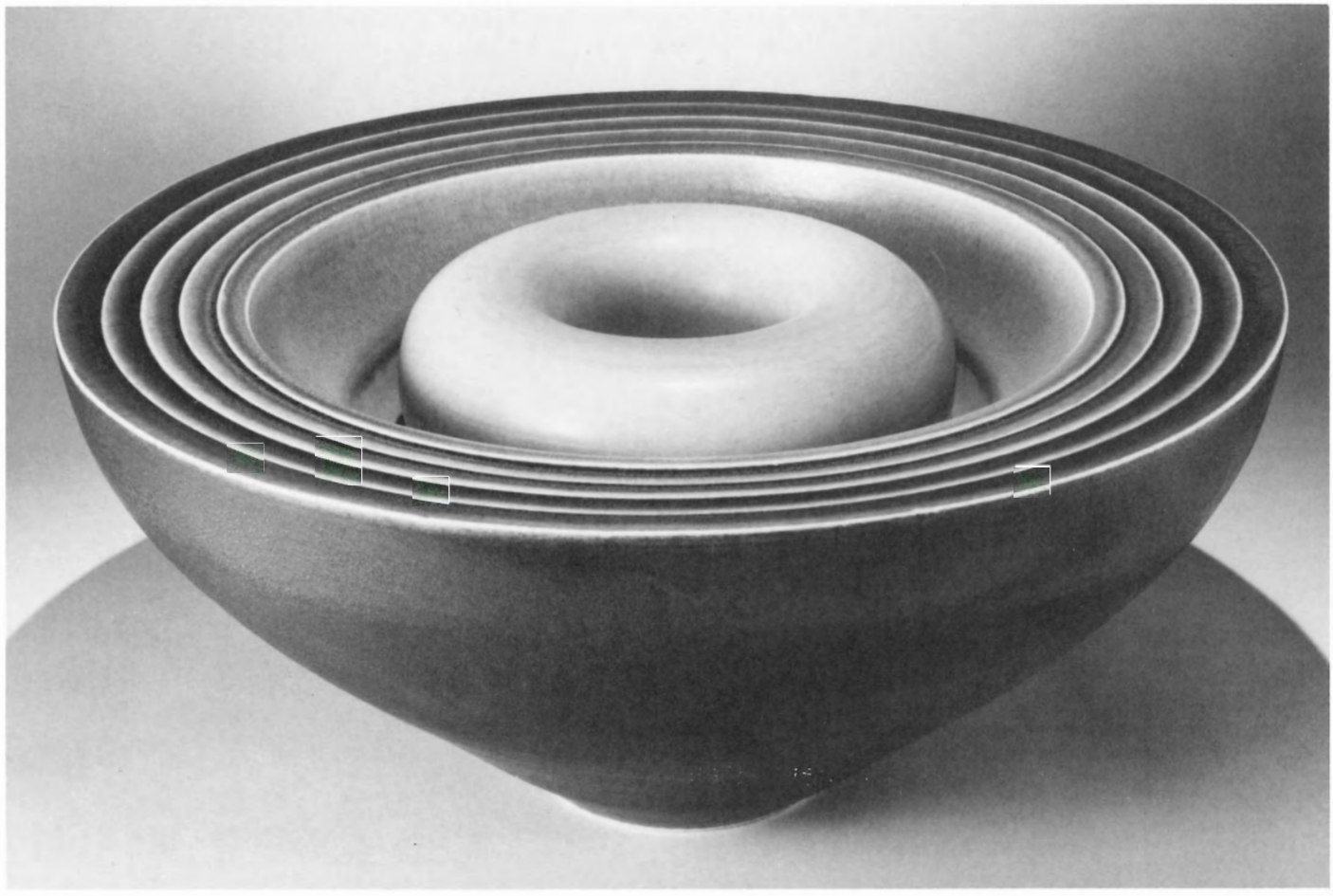
These works were exhibited at Steps into Space Gallery, Los Angeles (July 21–September 5, 1982).

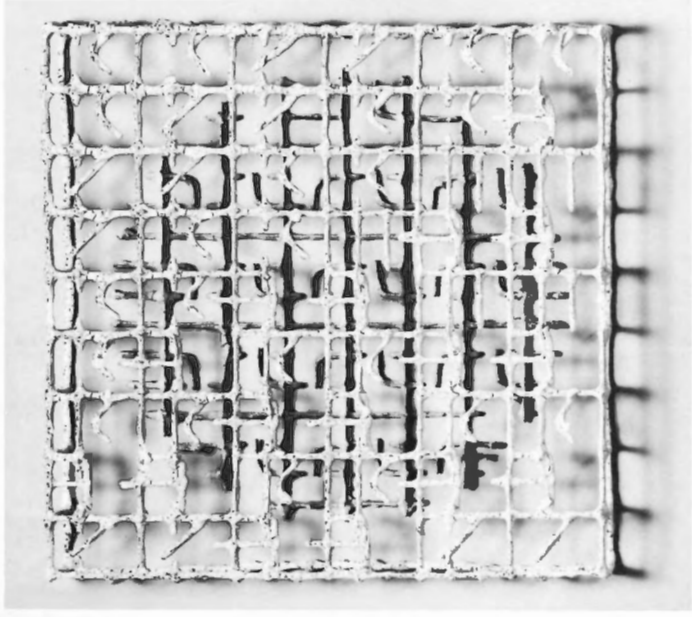
Ed Forde is an artist and writer who teaches at California State University, Los Angeles.

Hombre Nopalito *(1982), 40" (100 cm) high. Courtesy Stratford Gallery, Del Mar, California.*

Horizon Series: *meta-vessel (1982), 24" (60 cm) in diameter.*

Horizon Series: *clay/metal construction, 18" x 18" x 2½" (45 x 45 x 6.3 cm). Courtesy Anna Gardner Gallery, Stinson Beach, California. Photos: M. Lee Fatheree.*





Arthur Nelson

Charles Fiske

constructions of an everchanging yet coherent chain of images—conceptions[1]
Naum Gabo

It is possible to say that Arthur Nelson, with his grounding in mathematics, samples at will the world's externals and records that "tasting" in clay-metal constructions that comprise a "pictorial notebook," in the manner of Paul Klee. But having savored the world, having classified, summarized, and organized what he has perceived, he turns to his training in music and returns to the world his vast, double-walled vessels—magnificent major chords.

Within his chosen field of ceramics, Nelson's major interest has always been the vessel. Rhythm, repetition, movement have been dominant. Nelson's emphasis on these conceptual tenets of the Constructivists has intensified and brightened what might otherwise be the somber geometry of the vessel. This enhancement of the clay surface makes that surface a light-catching, shadow-casting activity.

The *Horizon* series comprises both Nelson's clay-metal constructions and his double-walled clay vessels. The former indicate a change in Nelson's perceptual perspectives. Light, movement, and space manipulation are the base factors he draws upon in exploring these new possibilities. Whereas the earlier *Oceans and Space* wall pieces (1980) were meditations on the dark underside of color, triadic majors reversed into unnumbered minors—browns, darkest reds, black blues—the new clay-metal constructions are light in color.

The basic panels of Nelson's constructions are about two feet square. These are cut and welded, packed with clay, glazed and fired, and then welded together to form grids two to three inches deep. At times these grids are in turn combined into larger constructions, as in *Nine Looking In.* Here the overall rhythms are acccented by internal notes; outer and inner fabrics intrude into and puncture the space between outer and inner surfaces. The defined space becomes as potent as the clay-metal frame itself; its space is interrupted by the frame's pointing, vinelike stems. Brief staccato notes within the wide calm of the overall form. Clocks ticking. A minimal movement sounding, remarking only this: a commonplace Immediate; the circling minutiae of past and future into a many-directioned, multiple-horizoned Now.

The vessels in the *Horizon* series are double-walled, thrown from a single base. The joining of the two walls is made by a wide horizontal plane, resulting in a visually massive rim—as much as five inches wide. This rim brings the rapid upward force of the exterior wall to an abrupt arrest; opposing forces join into a coherent whole. Each vessel is a demonstration of force, a study in movement: step slow, wing swift. They are brilliantly glazed in primary colors—striking rhythms of one, two, three. Unified as they are by force, by color, each becomes individual and remarkable. What was perception experienced becomes conception made manifest.

Two examples. One horizontal, flaring outward from a four-inch base to its greatest diameter of twenty-eight inches, turning back on itself with equal swiftness to its centering rim. Total height: eight inches. The glaze is a profoundly rich, matt black amethyst; the interior "pit" or "negative vessel" (double walls equal double vessels) again amethyst, with hare's-fur threads of beige. In this interior vessel rests yet another, with gross heavy glaze of raku ivory. The entire vessel a concept of core chaos, evolving into measures of civilization. A meditation on primordial force.

Contrariwise, a twenty-two-inch-tall vessel combines fundamental ceramic forms, a half sphere mounted on a cylinder: up-ness supporting out-ness. The glazes are bright green, bright red orange, dazzle of blues and glossy. The surfaces catch and cast every chance glimmer from window or chandelier. This vessel is totally self-contained, splendid in its announcement:
I Am.
Gabo again:

These consciously constructed images are the very essence of a reality of the world . . .[2]

Arthur Nelson's constructions, both clay and metal-clay, invite and welcome the observer's mind. In their simplicity, their directness, their total identities known, they give a sense of "growing"—a leaf unfolding, a cloud forming. Arthur Nelson achieves a quiet, a serenity in his work almost unique in 1983.

1. Naum Gabo, *Of Divers Arts,* Bollingen Series XXV-8 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962).
2. Ibid.

The Horizon *series were exhibited at Anna Gardner Gallery, Stinson Beach, California (October 10–November 14, 1982).*

Charles Fiske teaches ceramic art history at California College of Arts & Crafts, Oakland.

Sandblasted vessel with glass noodles, 11½" (37.5 cm) high. Courtesy American Hand, Washington, D.C.

Don Pilcher

Edward Lebow

Don Pilcher has gone to a lot of trouble to add some "umph" to the surfaces of his pots, and they never let you forget it. This is too bad, because Pilcher throws simple, often elegant forms.

His recent bowls swell graciously to a point an inch or two below the rim, where the form cambers slightly inward. His lidded jars are just as fecund. Their tops and bottoms join like two halves of an eggshell to produce obovoid shapes. There is a mix of small and large. The small containers have what can be called "non-handles" in the centers of their domed lids. These tiny nipples of clay rising through the glaze suggest, among other things, that you take your other hand out of your pocket and lift the lid with two. The large containers come with a better grip, however. Their knobs look something like tires that have rolled across the lid and somehow become mired up to their wheelbases in the clay and glaze. In a quick glance they summarize in miniature the profile of the whole form. But, as I said a moment ago, there is more to this work than their forms.

Pilcher seems to want the exteriors of his pots to act as compelling graphic surfaces. It isn't good enough for them to be appealing skins. They have to be worthy of the discrete concentration usually reserved for drawings and paintings.

This concern hasn't cropped up overnight, but has developed astride Pilcher's involvement with porcelain. In the past, he has made it plain that the white-bodied clay is an ideal ground for drawing and painting. It is absorbent, fine-toothed, and has reflective qualities that lend its slips, decoration, and glazes a wide range of values.

In particular, Pilcher is sweet on the musing luminosity of its surface. Highly reflective glazes tend to capture stray light and suspend it in bright and elusive squiggles somewhere between the sheen and the clay body. They produce a visual depth that matt surfaces, for example, cannot. Matt glazes diffuse light over the surface: the color tends to glow; the texture, glaze, and raised decoration of the pot are accentuated. As a result, matt glazes seem to stress the physical characteristics of the surface, rather than the purely visual ones.

In the past, Pilcher played the one against the other by employing a larder of decorative techniques. For instance, he would incise his pots and then float squirming flagella of slip trailings over their surfaces. Under a sheen of glaze, these graphic displays would tangle with zinging bits of light. Together, these would mix in the eye as lines that appeared to float while nevertheless remaining beneath the surface of the glaze.

Maybe this is the reason he sandblasted the glazes on his recent pots; to peel away their gloss and reveal some of those underlying qualities. With the top layer gone, the parched and scabrously cracked underlayers, and the white of the clay body itself become prominent. Yet this prominence lasts only as long as Pilcher leaves them that way. Unfortunately, he didn't.

On top of this dusty ground he sprinkled white and colored bits of glass. Occasionally, this shredded coconut topping combines with extruded slivers of porcelain. Since these slivers were fired along with the glaze, they poke through from beneath it. In this fairly simple play of over/under, one contingent of decorative worms is submerged, the other afloat.

The problem here is not that Pilcher sacrificed the utility of the pots for a somewhat narrow visual function, but his choice of methods. This kind of getting visual invites getting physical. You want to get cheek and jowl close, to examine the details. And once you do, you see that the flecks of color and "light" embodied in the glass not only appear to float on the visual space Pilcher wants you to imagine, but they in fact swim on their own tiny puddles of glue.

A small detail? Perhaps, but as your eye wanders across the pot, moving from one to another of these shiny spills, you find yourself dwelling on how the glass got there, rather than on its visual consequences. Given the trouble Pilcher seems to have gone to for this finishing touch, it is out of character, if not tacky.

It is a small detail, but these piddling facts of craftsmanship are often the make-or-break details of pots made for pedestal service. The smallest of them have the power to ensure the eye an undisturbed route to the desired effect. They contribute to that sense of accuracy you feel in a good work. And they confirm the moment by moment concentration of the artist on how the object came to be.

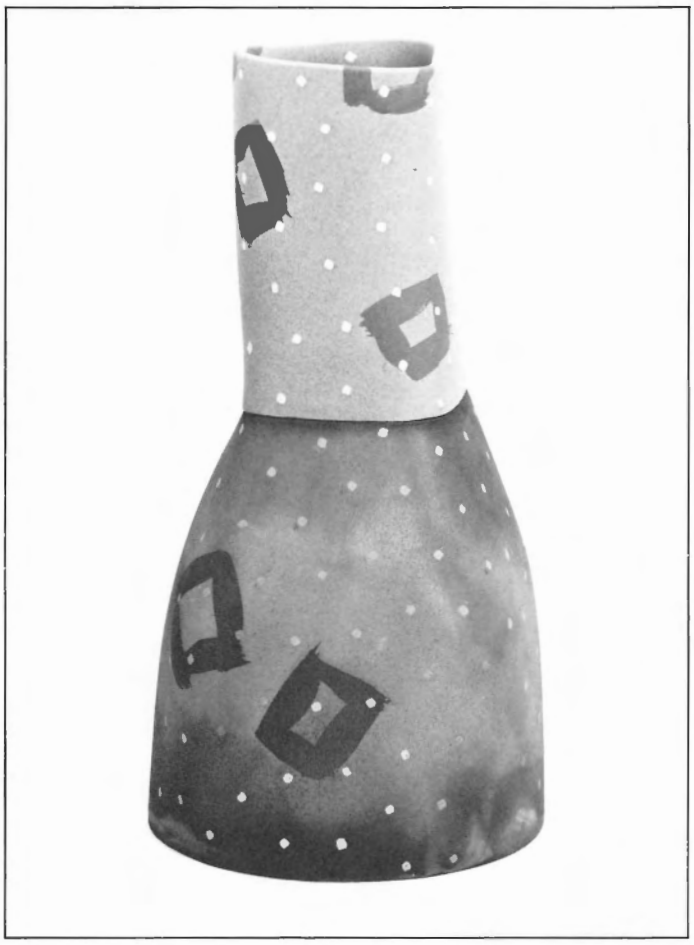
Pilcher's solution simply lacks this sensitivity.

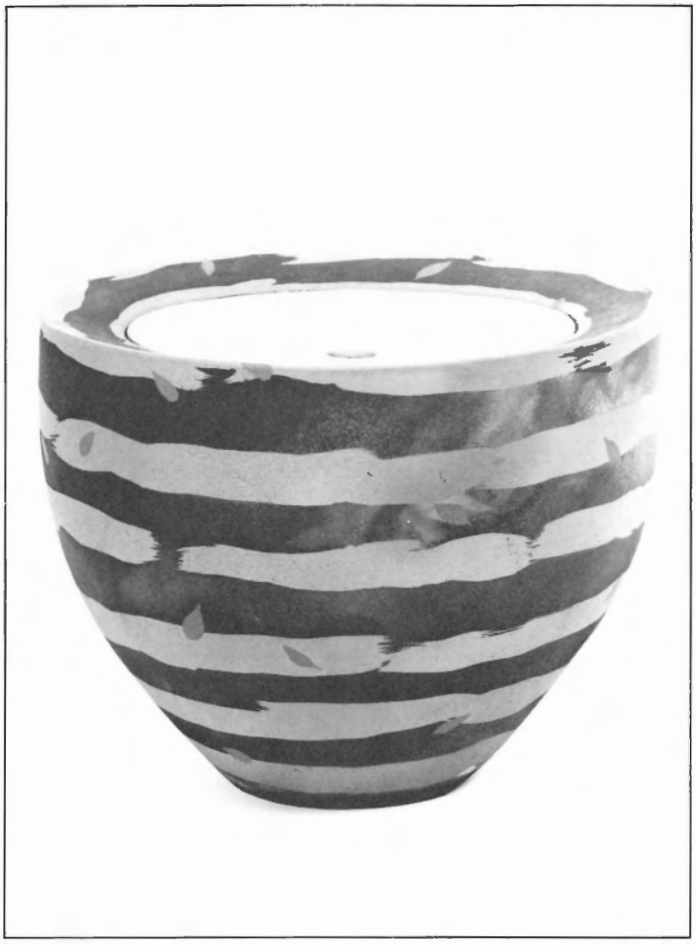
Ceramics by Don Pilcher were shown at American Hand, Washington, D.C., last October.

Edward Lebow is a freelance writer living in New York City and a frequent contributor to American Ceramics.

Donna Polseno

David Crane and Janet Niewald





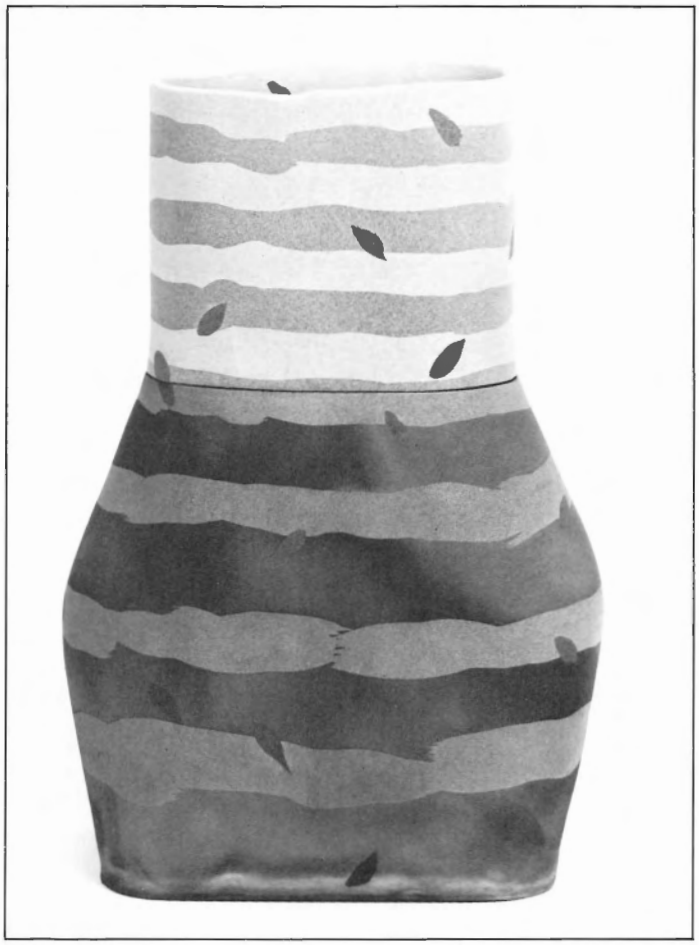
Over the past eight years, Donna Polseno has created one-of-a-kind raku vessels. Influenced by Oriental ceramics, her earlier works were primarily geometric baskets enriched with naturalistic surface images. Recently, there has been a change, an evolution, in Polseno's approach to her work. Through her need to investigate more freely and directly the relationship of form to color and surface, a more decorative and personal conception of ceramics has emerged. She has retained a reductive approach to form and a painterly attitude toward surface decoration from her earlier work. In her new series of pots, however, these characteristics are accentuated and developed more completely.

The profiles of Polseno's pots are simple, even austere. The tall vessel and vase shapes are two-pieced, capped with shallow "bowls," which act as lids covering the interior volume of the pots. Inset lids follow the concave shoulders of her lower, rounded jars to complete and contain their forms. Each type of cover becomes an integral part of the total pot.

Polseno explores through color the relationship of lid and cover to body. Through extreme value contrast (dark bodies and light lids), an illusory space is created in the forms, and this illusion of space oscillates. At one moment the lids float as unattached shapes; at another they seem to recede, conveying a feeling of interior space. Polseno's use of a finger hole in the lids of her jars—which allow physical access to the interiors without deterring from the primary color relationship of lid and body—underscores the sense of spatial illusion and mystery.

The decorative, patterned surfaces of the pots may at first seem to belie their simple profiles. Yet freely applied horizontal stripes, geometric shapes, and painterly marks activate and enliven these staid, quiet forms. Just as Polseno divides each pot with both form and color into lid and body, so she limits her surface treatment to two types of applied marks on each pot. Over her patterned motifs, seemingly random marks lead the viewer around the forms. Her palette is primary, sometimes subtle, sometimes vibrantly pure. With this palette, Polseno creates yet another illusion of color and space—that of "simultaneous contrast." For example, the medium blue slip seen against the dark body of a pot appears to be a different blue when seen against that same pot's light-valued lid. Both unity and visual excitement are created through this interaction of surface and form.

The dramatic color variations in the work are created by combining two different firing processes on a single pot. For the light-valued section of a pot, underglazes are sprayed over resist patterns and marks, then fired in an oxidation atmosphere. The bottom, darker section is decorated in a similar manner, with a copper-saturated engobe (a thick slip containing glaze elements)



(Left to right) Untitled vessels (1982), 18", 15", 15" and 16" (45, 37.5, and 40 cm) high. Photos: Charles Whitescarber.

used as one of the base colors, then fired in a raku kiln. As it cools, this section is fumed with copper sulfate, then smoked in a combustible material. The areas of copper engobe exhibit the flashing effects of this fuming and reduction. By firing with this unique approach, the rather flat, brilliant colors of oxidation are played against the softer mottled tones of raku.

Dualities of color intensity, value, surface pattern, and form (lid to body) are characteristic of Polseno's recent work. Her pots show a continuing search to unify opposing elements of visual and physical experience within a decorative and beautiful object.

Donna Polseno's ceramics were most recently shown at Holsten Gallery, Palm Beach, Florida; Gallery 500, Philadelphia; and Martin Schweig Gallery, St. Louis; she will next be seen at Elements Gallery, New York (March 15-April 9).

Ceramist David Crane is an assistant professor of art at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. Janet Niewald is an exhibiting painter who currently teaches as a part-time assistant professor of art at the same university. They are married and live and work outside of Blacksburg.

Restoration of Hope *(1982), 75" (187.5 cm) high. Courtesy Allrich Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: Elaine Keenan.*

Dan Snyder

Joanne Burstein

In his recent show at the Allrich Gallery, Dan Snyder installed ten life-size sculptures of the human figure. Six of these were made of clay; cracked gestural flowing forms that were sculpted, broken apart, fired with a lush white and pastel pink crackled glaze, and reassembled with grout. The rest of the figures were cast whole from a pale pink aggregate marble, the type of agglomerate stone and cement widely used in the 1930s to pave theater lobbies and train stations. For a decade he has worked with the human figure in various materials: plaster, wood silhouettes, cement, telephone poles, paper, cheesecloth, and clay. This work is the latest sequel in his exploration of figure and material in an emotionally expressive dialogue.

The raku figures have titles like *Restoration of Hope,* a man with chin up and arms clenched to his sides to brave the storm, or whatever else might come; *The Magician,* a similar figure with fists raised in an assertive gesture of strength; and *The Restoration of Doubt,* a wallpiece with major breaks and pieces missing, which have been filled in with grout. These works are beautiful three-dimensional mosaics, intriguing in their interplay between the figurative image and the patterning of assembled pieces. The richly sensual glaze surfaces almost demand to be touched. The figures are abstracted enough not to intimidate with precious detailing or specific visage; the surface texture is close enough to the comforting realm of ceramic cups and bowls to invite our exploration. In this way, they are quite "human." These works are created and literally "restored"—passing through a transformation by fire that, like the fire of Alchemy, is implied by the process.

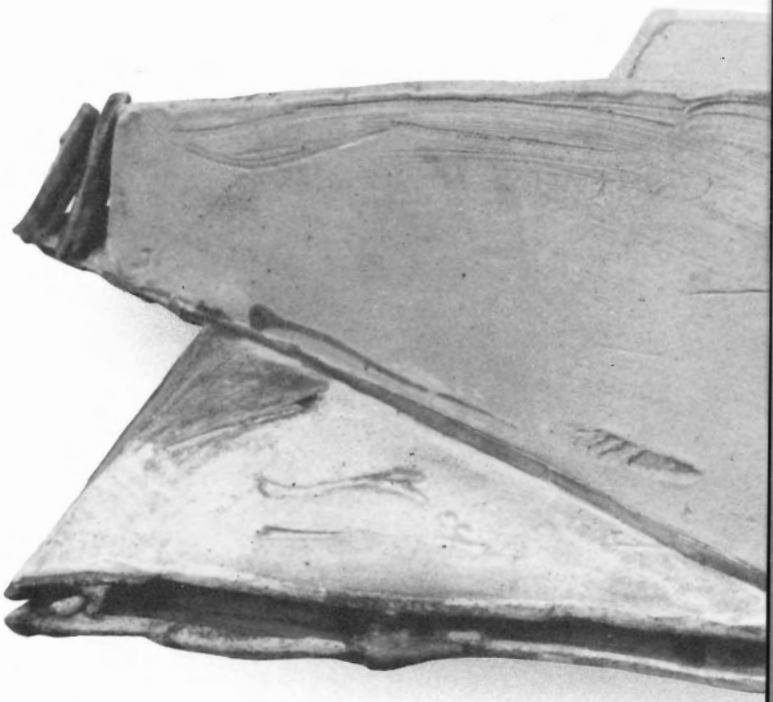
The counterbalancing marble pieces are smooth, rounded, idealized, Art Deco figures. *The Source* relates directly in formal pose to *The Source Restored* in the classic, ideal female stance with arms invitingly up behind her head—a lifesize trophy. *The Effortless Dream* and *The Enigma* also have their formal equivalents in raku. They are so stylized as to seem architectural elements, so predictable in surface as to not invite inquiry, so self-contained as to prohibit dialogue of any kind. They are beautiful and indifferent—unapproachable. They are also a brilliant physical manifestation of the unattainable quality of perfection and its inherent inhumanity. By using the vapid deco style, as opposed to its original source in classic Greek sculpture, Snyder is making a visual value judgment.

Like Snyder's previous work, there is a dramatic, even theatrical presence to these figures that emphasizes their allegorical content. By using both male and female figures in the context of a dialogue between the real and the ideal, Snyder alludes not only to the dama enacted between men and women, but to the classic dependency between artist and muse. *Spirit of the Quest* (a cast marble deer with a magnificent spread of horns), at first a seeming anomaly, makes a specific statement about masculine pride and vulnerability to the hint in context with the other works.

Snyder presents, in this grouping, sculptures of high technical execution and emotional presence. While each can stand wholly on its own, the context is as meaningful as a script is to any particular passage of a play. Like George Segal or Stephen de Staebler, who find their respective materials consistently compatible with their own overriding feelings toward the condition of man, Dan Snyder gives a central place to materials. Here, clay and cast marble are chosen for their inherent physical qualities, which illustrate disparities between the ideal and the real, the masculine and the feminine, optimism and pessimism. His vehicle is the human figure, his subject matter archetypal human emotion.

The works reviewed here were seen at Allrich Gallery, San Francisco (August 3–September 11, 1982).

Kenneth Vavrek



Sid Sachs

In 1977, Ken Vavrek was working in raku, and his forms evolved into what he called island pots. He seems to have been drawn by the parallel between islands being surrounded or contained by the sea and the tradition of the vessel as an object of containment.[1] The work spoke of other relationships as well, including time and man's presence in nature. Small slabs of clay lifted off the main surface of his forms, recalling such prehistoric constructions as dolmens.

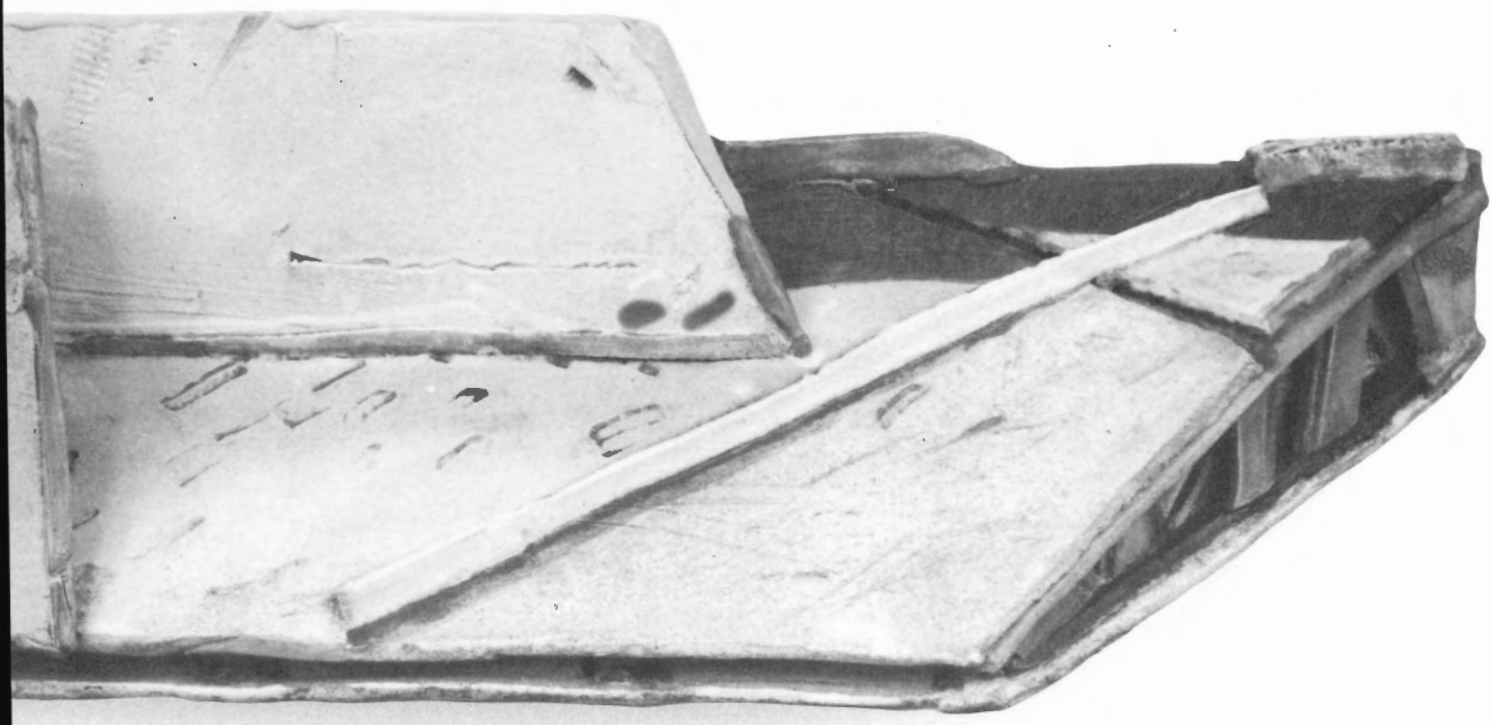
The recent wall sculptures of Ken Vavrek are both a continuation of and a deviation from these earlier works. The new structures comprise sections of stoneware fired with high- and low-firing glazes. They again portray abstracted geologic referents; here, however, they are desert landscapes rather than islands. And where the earlier works were seen in the round, these new sculptures are all wall mounted; as they are viewed frontally, one's critical references begin to play off recent relief painting as much as sculpture.

Vavrek "draws" with clay in several ways. First, he draws with the edges of planes as they meet adjacent planes. He also uses long, thin strands of clay to draw the viewer's eye along these wedges, as if creating a gross, three-dimensional line. Second, and less obviously, Vavrek scratches subtle lines into the still-wet clay that read simultaneously as clay or rock strata or pentimento. Last, Vavrek creates spatial drawings with colored glazes and slips; sometimes "painting" entire planes a single color, at other times drawing across planes with glaze. Earth colors predominate—tans, buffs, grays—though Vavrek often throws in more electric blues, especially in the deeper crevices, thus giving the illusion of even deeper recesses than are actually there.

Vavrek's works are characteristically blocky, stiltlike forms. In the earlier island pots, these stilts often elevate smaller elements above the surface of the main body or, in several instances, create a base for larger slabs. In the recent works, these stilts are less conspicuous, reducing the weight of the larger masses as well as pushing the slabs out from the wall. Due to their darker coloration

Rough & Ready *(1982), 66" x 56" x 12½" (165 x 140 x 31 cm).*

Crossed Wind *(1982), 11¼" x 37½" x 7¼" (28 x 94 x 18 cm).*



and the fact that they are seen running underneath the surface of the clay forms (which read as the earth's surface), the stilts read more realistically than ever before and seem like timbers supporting mine shafts.

The wall sculptures tend to be larger than the works in the previous show.[2] And because they are mounted on the wall, they pose more complicated engineering problems. Vavrek first mounts a heavy plywood backing directly and solidly into the wall. He has devised a way of then slipping the interlocking slabs of clay sequentially, so that each section supports the next.

If I have any difficulty with the wall sculptures, it may be that as abstractions, they fall (literally) a little flat. It's as if Vavrek has spent more time inventing their novel method of construction than plotting their visual impact. Whereas the island pots, especially *Eonata* or *Golden Sea,* sustained a modest graceful presence, the current works seem banal. Not content to allow clay to speak for itself, he models it into fairly flaccid, amorphous blobs. In *Rough and Ready,* for example, a fairly prominent form slicing the composition diagonally reads as dough—more like an Italian roll than a rock formation. The forms are rigidly bound into compositional vectors, however, with planes distorted by perspective. *Rough and Ready* resembles Stephen Posen's early paintings of draped boxes, with real space substituted for Posen's illusionistic space.

Conversely, it seems like a rural stoneware version of Frank Stella's recent painting-sculptures, but without the French curves, high-tech honeycomb metal, and bilious *faux* graffiti. Of this work, I tended to respond to Vavrek's smaller, more restrained constructions that are more realistic, like a canyon wall with a few boulders in front. Yet as realistic constructions they just miss because Vavrek seems to be hedging his bets, restraining himself in the safe nether world between the nonobjective and the trompe l'oeil. Compared to the high standards of others who have drawn comparisons between clay and landscape, such as Wayne Higby or Charles Simonds, Ken Vavrek falls just short.

1. "I felt I had found a perfect metaphor to deal with special meanings and relationships that man puts on islands. The concise spatial statement dealing directly with containment, both physically and symbolically, was also compelling." Ken Vavrek, *Terra Firma,* exhibition catalogue (Philadelphia: Rosenfeld Gallery, 1977).

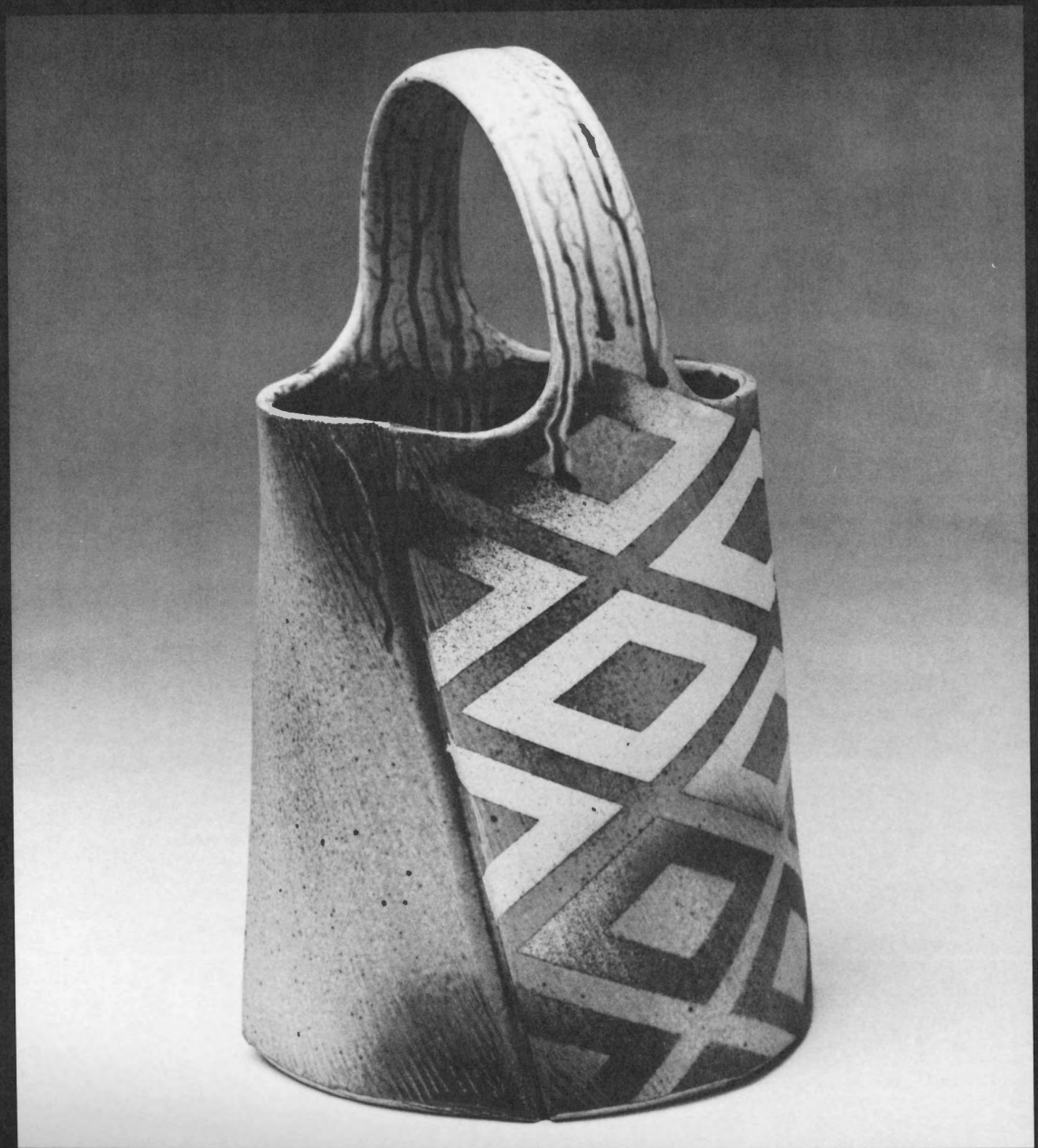
2. *Desert Break,* in the earlier exhibition, trailed over a double-level plinth for a distance of over sixteen feet. Composed of separate clay components, it rested flat on the bases and dealt with gravity in a very passive manner. The current exhibition's works, scaling the wall vertically, could not rely on the same sensibilities of construction.

The recent work of Ken Vavrek was on view at Rosenfeld Gallery, Phildelphia (May 2-23) and at Heller Gallery, New York (October 2-24, 1982).

Sid Sachs is a painter and critic and a frequent contributor to The New Art Examiner.

David Nelson

February 4 – March 11, 1983



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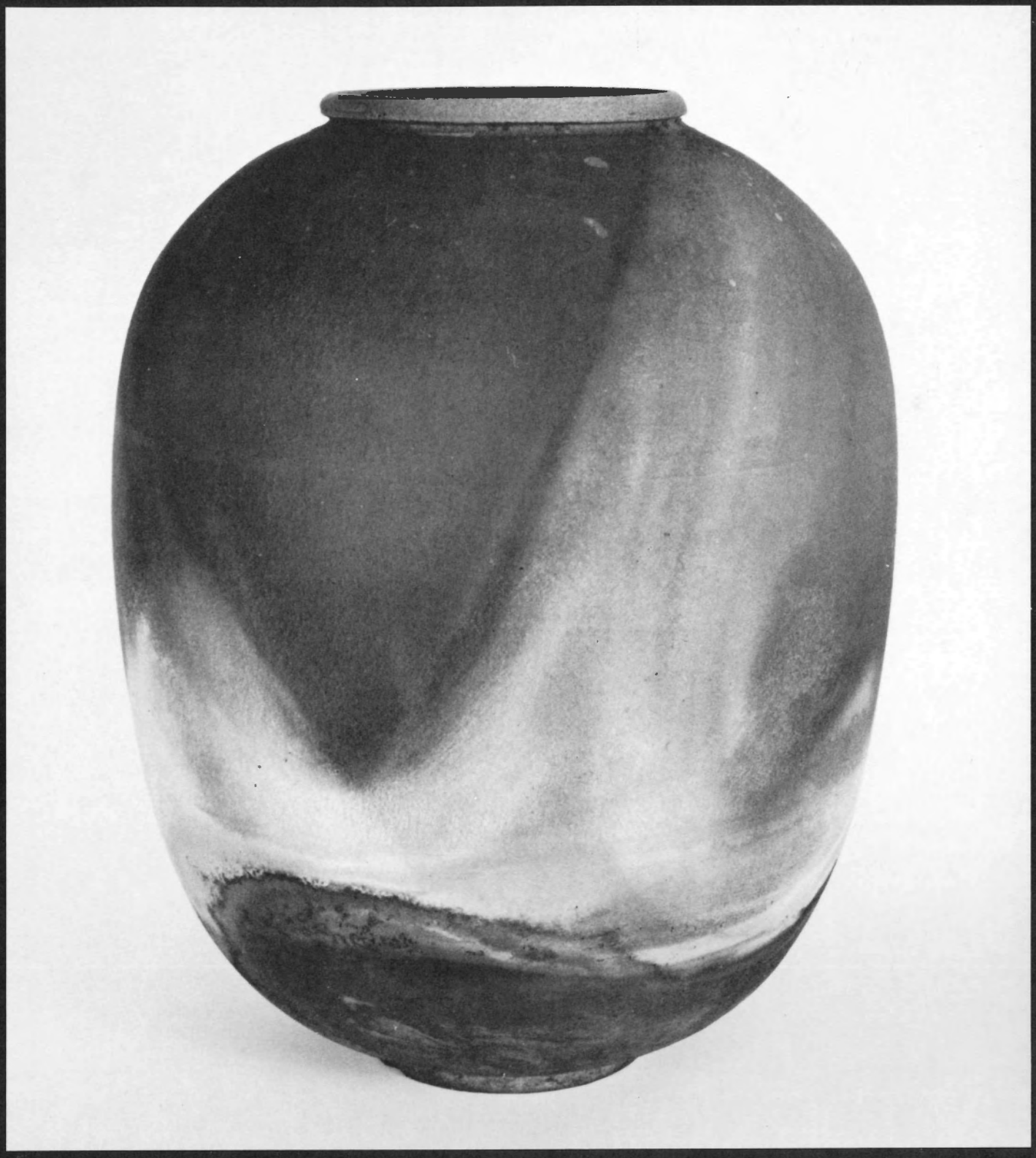

EXHIBITS/1983

January 31 - February 26	***BENNETT BEAN***
February 28 - April 2	***PORCELAIN:*** *Nancy Jurs Castle, John Gill, Jim Makins, Constance Mayeron, Charles Olson, Sandra Simon, Betty Woodman*
April 4 - 30	***DOROTHY HAFNER***
July 5 - 30	***AURORE CHABOT***
August 1 - 27	***2nd ANNUAL CUP SHOW***
August 29 - October 1	***DONNA POLSENO***
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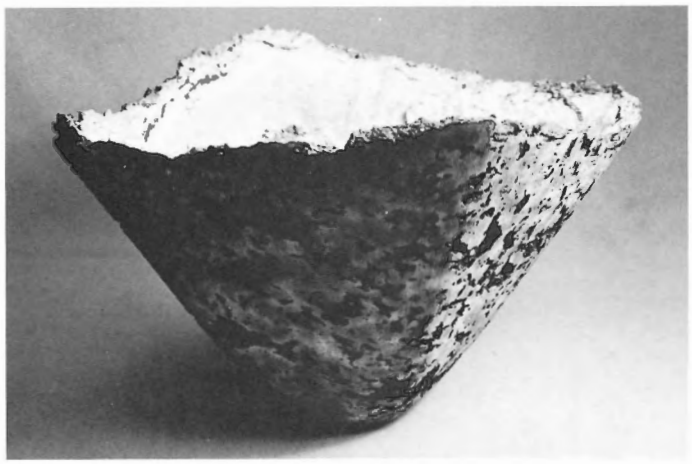

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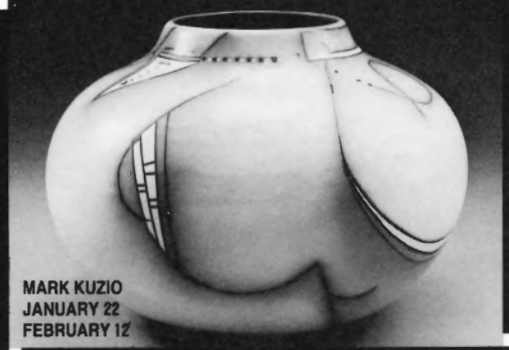

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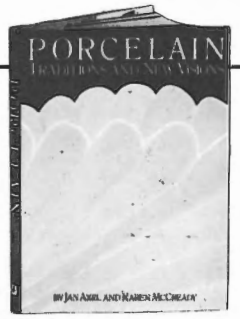

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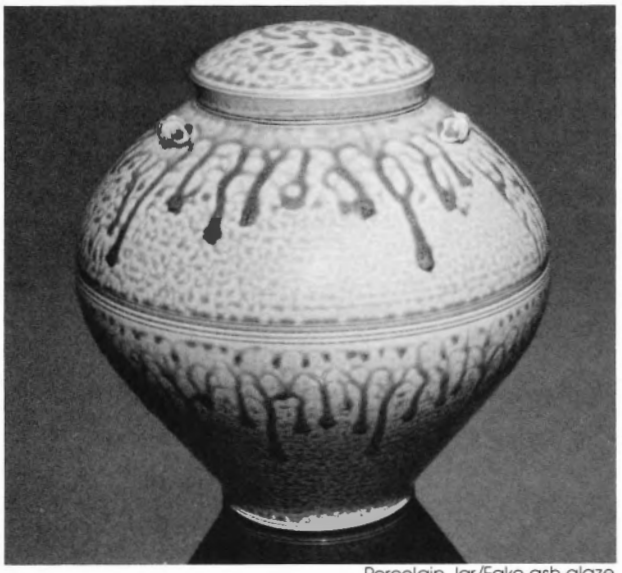

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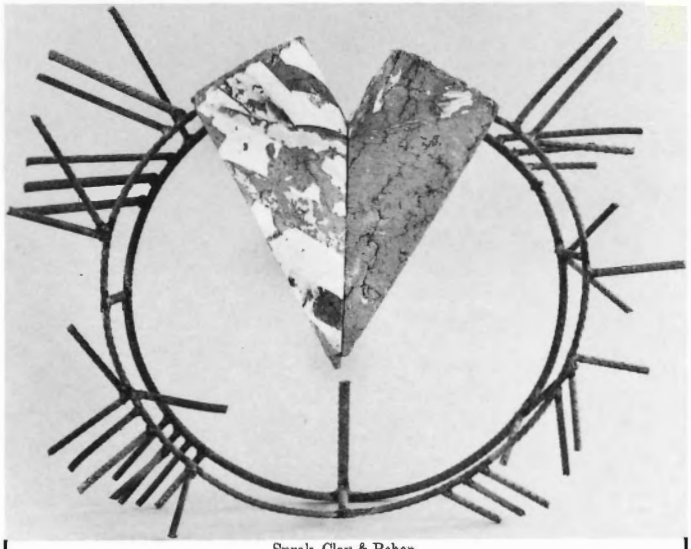

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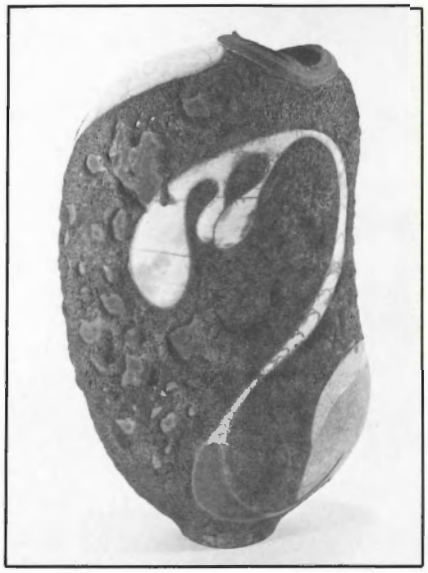

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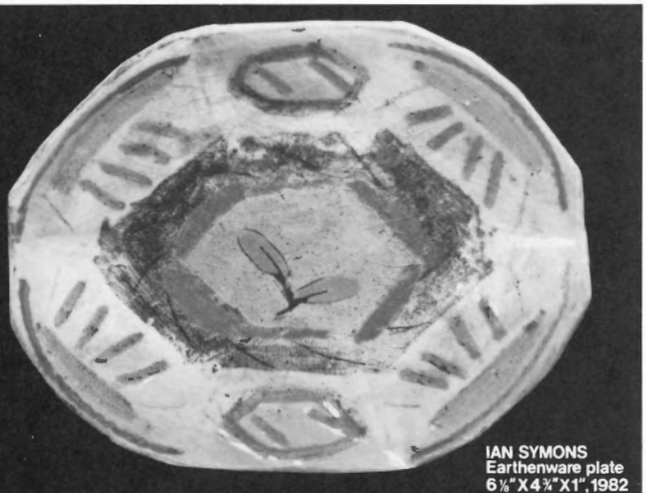

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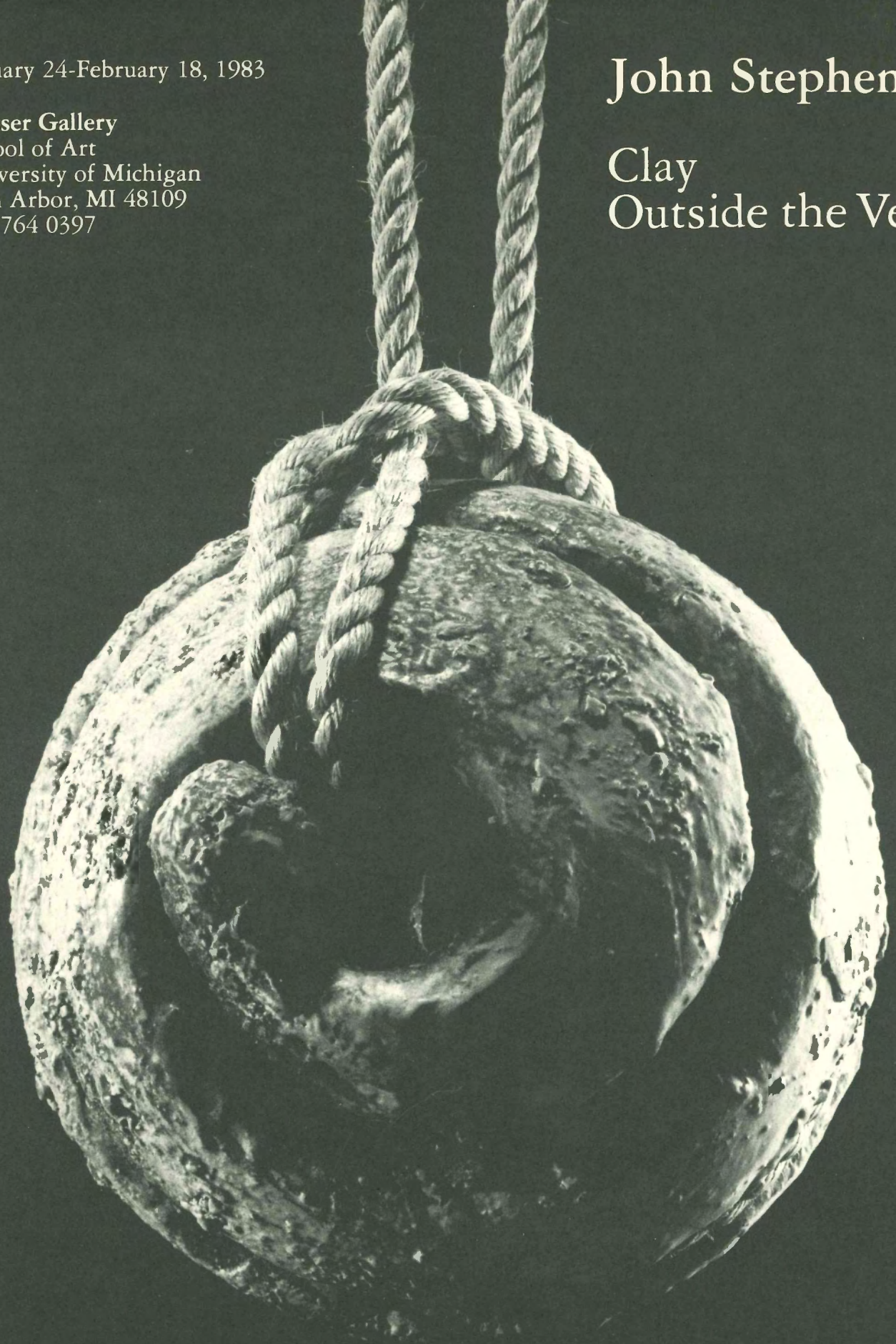

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